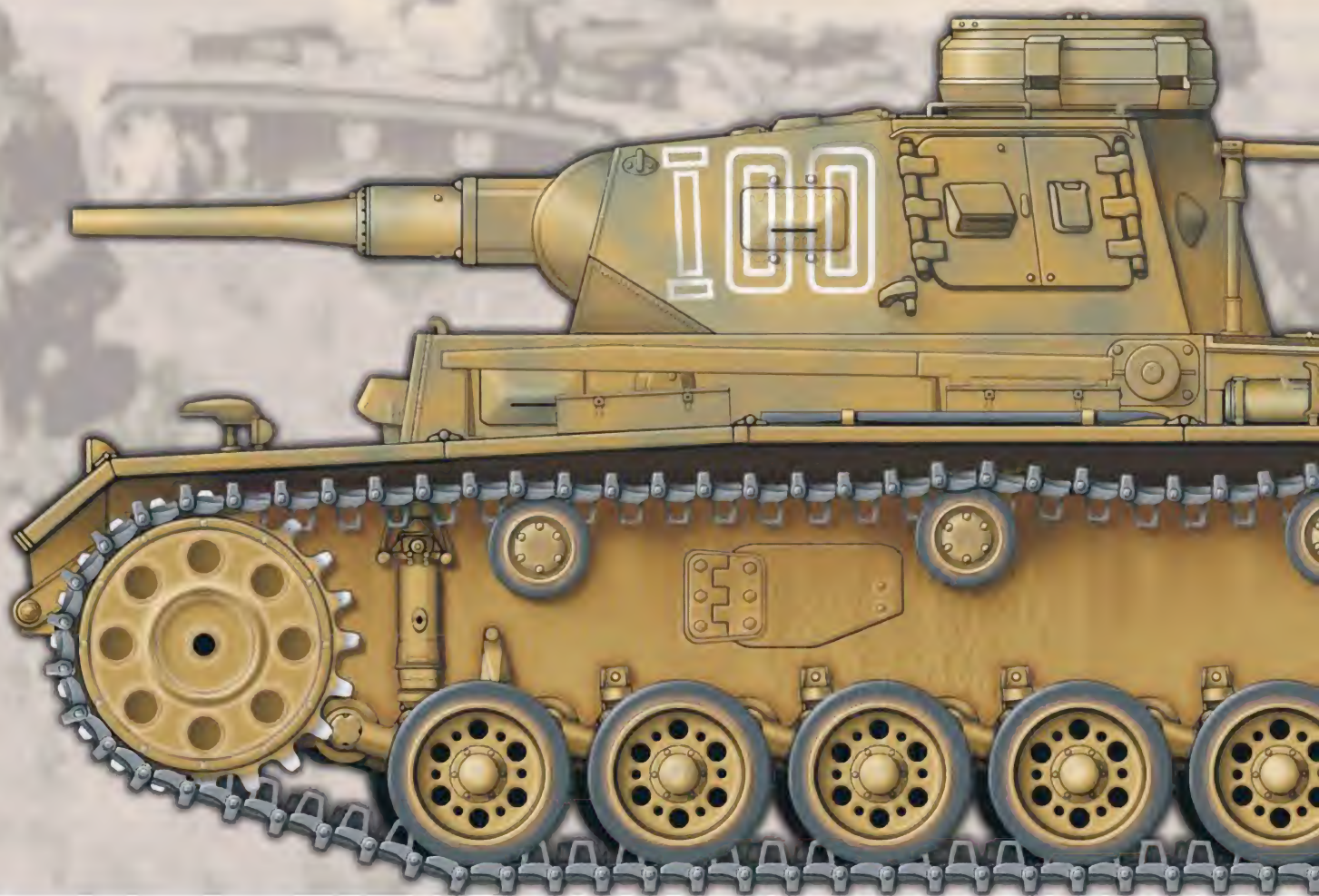


FIREFLY COLLECTION No.9

THE TARTAR ROAD

THE WIKING DIVISION
AND THE DRIVE TO THE CAUCASUS, 1942

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY
DENNIS OLIVER AND STEPHEN ANDREW



SUPERBLY DETAILED COLOUR PROFILES, BLACK AND WHITE ARCHIVE PHOTOGRAPHS,
COMPREHENSIVE ORGANISATIONAL AND EQUIPMENT CHARTS, UNIT HISTORY AND MAPS

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Front cover: Panzerbefehlswagen III ausf H. Stab, SS-Panzer-Abteilung 5. This vehicle is discussed in detail on page 13. The photograph at the top of the page shows the Pzkw IV ausf F2 tank of the 3.Kompanie commander Obersturmführer Fritz Darges being transported to the front in 1942.



Above: Tanks and personnel of 1.Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Abteilung 5 photographed in the Caucasus in 1942. Although the handwritten caption to this image is difficult to read and somewhat confusing we have been able to tentatively identify these men as Untersturmführer Max Kolodziey, standing at left in the group, Obersturmführer Günther Schnabel, the commander of 1.Kompanie, wearing the black Panzer uniform and Oberscharführer Alfred Grossrock nearest the camera. Both Schnabel and Kolodziey were killed in the battles of late 1942. At left: Shoulder strap of an Obersturmführer of SS-Artillerie-Regiment 5.

The invasion of the Soviet Union and the subsequent battles fought during the second half of 1941 had seen the German army advance to within striking distance of Moscow, occupying almost all of European Russia, by the beginning of December. Although the Wehrmacht was soon after driven back from the gates of the Soviet capital, the Germans had gained all of eastern Poland - occupied by the Russians since September 1939 - the Baltic States, Byelorussia and much of the Ukraine. In the north Leningrad was besieged while in the south the important city of Rostov-on-Don was only 50 kilometres from the frontline. The proposition that a combination of autumn rain, winter snow and fresh divisions heralded the defeat of the German armies in the east, widely believed today, was far from evident at the time. In addition, many modern histories repeat the Soviet claim that the Red Army was able to inflict over 700,000 casualties on the Axis forces by the end of 1941 whereas the true figures are closer to 290,000 personnel of all branches of the Wehrmacht killed with approximately 26,600 reported missing (see note 1, page 32).

These losses were serious but not debilitating and the Germans had every reason to believe that the outcome of the coming campaign season would create a situation where Stalin would have no choice but to sue for peace. By February of 1942 planning was well underway on a strategy to regain the lost initiative of the previous summer whereby the armies in the north would capture Leningrad while those in the centre would conduct limited attacks aimed at holding the front and forcing the Russians to commit troops there. The armies on the southern sector of the front commanded by Generalfeldmarschall Fedor von Bock would strike across the Kuban steppe deep into the Caucasus. Even at this early stage it was acknowledged that shortages of both fuel and transport vehicles meant that simultaneous offensives along the whole front were no longer feasible and the assault on Leningrad would only commence once Bock's objectives had been gained. The southern operation - codenamed Fall Blau or Case Blue - was approved by Hitler on 5 April 1942 in Führer directive No 41 (2).

The southern operation was planned to unfold in three stages referred to as Blau I, II and III (3). In Blau I, 2.Armee - initially under Generaloberst Maximilian Reichsfreiherr von Weichs and later Generaloberst Hans von Salmuth - and 4.Panzerarmee commanded by Generaloberst Hermann Hoth would advance from Kursk to Voronezh, continuing on towards the Volga in an effort to secure the northern flank of the operation. The German units here were supported by 2nd Hungarian Army. Within 48 hours, Blau II would commence with 6.Armee under General der Panzertruppen von Paulus supporting 4.Panzerarmee, moving parallel to Hoth until they reached the Volga at Stalingrad. Importantly Paulus was directed not to take the city at this stage. When the first and second phases of the plan had been completed 1.Panzerarmee under Generaloberst Paul Ludwig Ewald von Kleist would begin Blau III by striking towards the region of the lower Don and the city of Rostov. Protecting Kleist's right flank was 17.Armee, commanded by Generaloberst Erwin Jaenecke, and on his left was 4th Romanian Army.

It was stressed that the ensuing battles must culminate in the encirclement and subsequent destruction of large numbers of Soviet troops as had the engagements of the previous summer. In an effort to confuse the Soviet

command and draw troops away from the southern front, a limited offensive codenamed Fredericus II would be launched from Kharkov a week before the start of Blau I.

The strategic and economic importance of the Caucasus cannot be overstated and some explanation of its allure may be helpful. Straddling the crossroads of Europe and Asia the immense Caucasus region is divided by the mountain range which also bears its name. The southern portion is referred to as the Transcaucasus and in 1942 the region was made up of the Soviet Socialist Republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia - although parts of the latter two extended into the Grand Caucasus range. The mountainous regions and the foothills to the north were made up of several autonomous administrative regions such as Dagestanskaya, Kalmytskaya, Checheno-Ingushskaya and Severo-Osetinskaya - all reflecting their ethnic or linguistic make-up. The areas further to the north - below the Don and Volga rivers - were part of the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic. Real political control of the individual republics and autonomous regions was however exercised by Moscow.

The oilfields of Azerbaijan were some of the richest in the world with those around Baku, the capital city, producing 80 percent of the Soviet Union's needs in 1942. The region also contained some of Russia's most valuable mineral resources with the mines at Chiatura, north-east of Tbilisi in Georgia, producing half of all the nation's manganese - a metal used in the manufacture of tank tracks. Almost as important as the Baku oilfields were those at Maykop and Grozny in the Ciscaucasus - the region to the north of the mountain range - which between them accounted for over 10 percent of national production. The region was also rich in coal and agricultural products including wheat, corn, sunflower seeds, beets and cotton. Its strategic importance should also not be underestimated as the whole area basically provides a land bridge between the Black and Caspian seas. It was here that a branch of the ancient Silk Road trade route led from Uzbekistan to the Ukraine and was known locally as the Road of the Tartars.

Little wonder that oil-starved Germany, which had been denied its supplies from the Americas and the Middle East since 1939, eventually came to regard control of the Caucasus as essential to the continuation of the war. An advance into the Caucasus had another advantage: the Red Army would be forced to defend their precious oil supplies and natural resources and in so doing could be brought to battle and crushed (4).

As the spring approached Stalin maintained that Moscow would be the main objective, as it had been in 1941, and indeed the early phases of Fall Blau were intended to reinforce that idea. On Sunday, 28 June Hoth's tanks began their drive towards Voronezh, catching the enemy completely by surprise and advancing rapidly. Two days later Paulus' army began Blau II and by 30 June the two German forces had trapped the Soviet 40th Army between them. By 3 July lead elements of 4.Panzerarmee had crossed the Don near Voronezh and within 48 hours the city was surrounded on three sides - although the arrival of a Russian Tank Army did much to bolster the defences. On the same day the last Soviet units in the Crimea surrendered removing the threat to the Romanian oil fields at Ploesti which had previously been within range of Russian bombers.





Above: An NCO and two infantrymen of SS-Infanterie-Regiment Germania photographed during the Caucasus campaign. The Unterscharführer in the foreground is wearing an example of one of the field manufactured, camouflage shirts which seems to have been popular with officers and NCO by this stage of the war. These shirts were usually made from pieces of camouflage smocks or Zeltbahn tent quarters which were no longer serviceable and at least two different camouflage patterns can be discerned here. These unofficial garments are discussed further in the illustration section on page 22. Interestingly the camouflage smock of the soldier on the far left has been made from fabric printed in the Heer Splinter pattern sometimes referred to as Splittermuster 31 and used from 1932. Although it is difficult to be certain, the buttoned side opening which is just visible suggests that this garment may in fact be an example of the Army's M1942 reversible camouflage smock issued in very limited numbers from April 1942.

On 5 July, units of 4.Panzerarmee were fighting in the suburbs of Voronezh while 6.Armee had reached Ostrogozhsk almost 100 kilometres to the south. Leaving his infantry to deal with Voronezh, Hoth pushed his tanks south with the Don on their left. The direction of Paulus' attack at last convinced Stalin that Moscow was no longer in danger and he ordered that Voronezh, an important rail and road junction, be held at all costs. The Russians resisted until 13 July and needlessly consumed the irreplaceable resources of Heeresgruppe Süd and the attention of Bock, the army group's commander. Incensed at the delay and frustrated by Bock's insistence that the front around Voronezh be stabilised before the advance towards Stalingrad was resumed Hitler sacked the Field Marshal on 15 July (5).

Before the offensive began it was envisaged that the southern armies would at some point be divided into two groups and this was put into place on 9 July, well before the departure of Generalfeldmarschall von Bock. On the Army Group's left or western flank the newly formed Heeresgruppe A under Generalfeldmarschall Wilhelm List with 1.Panzerarmee, 11.Armee, 17.Armee and 4th Romanian Army was ordered to capture Rostov and advance into the Caucasus as far as Grozny and then on to Baku. To the east, Heeresgruppe B commanded by General-Oberst Maximilian von Weichs and comprising 4.Panzerarmee, 2.Armee, 6.Armee with 2nd Hungarian Army and 8th Italian Army in support were to advance to the Volga and take Stalingrad. The overall plan was set out in Führer directive No 45 of 23 July where once again the importance of the oilfields was not emphasised with the destruction of the Red Army and the denial of the Black Sea ports to the Russians being stressed. The drive into the Caucasus was codenamed Edelweiss while the advance towards Stalingrad was referred to as Fischreiher.

As preparations for the extension of Fall Blau were being made and Generalfeldmarschall von Bock was returning to Germany, the freshly trained Panzer battalion allocated to the SS-Division (mot) Wiking was making its way to the Front.

After the campaign of 1941 it was decided that a number of Waffen-SS divisions would be upgraded to motorised infantry status - which meant in effect, the addition of a tank battalion. By 28 January 1942 Hitler had authorised the creation of a Panzer-Abteilung for the Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler (mot) division and a second tank battalion for an as yet undetermined Waffen-SS formation. The first battalion's three medium companies were organised in accordance with Kriegsstarkeachweisung 1175 of 1 November 1941 but were initially under strength in both Pzkw II and Pzkw IV tanks (6).

The second battalion - which was soon named SS-Panzer-Abteilung 2 and commanded by Sturmbannführer Johannes-Rudolf Mühlenkamp - who had been seconded from SS-Division (mot) Reich where he had led the reconnaissance battalion - was based on KStN 1171 and KStN 1175. In simple terms this allowed for two light tank companies supported by a medium tank company and a more detailed explanation of the second battalion's actual strength can be found on page 7. It was expected that both battalions would be at full strength by the end of March (7). It was initially planned that

Mühlenkamp's battalion would be allocated to the Reich division however events at the front meant that the requirements of SS-Division (mot) Wiking took precedence and Mühlenkamp's unit was renamed SS-Panzer-Abteilung 5. There is some debate over the timing of this change of plan however Ewald Kladpor, who served as a platoon commander with the battalion, cites an entry in the SS-Führungshauptamt log dated 11 February 1942 which confirms both the reorganisation together with the establishment of a third battalion and this date is almost certainly correct.

The first and second companies of the Panzer battalion received their full complement of tanks between 12 and 27 March 1942 and these were mainly Pzkw III ausf J models with the 5cm L/60 gun although a number of vehicles armed with the shorter 5cm L/42 weapon were on hand - one reliable source giving a total of twelve and this is probably correct given that Kladpor states that eleven were still available on 27 September. At least one account suggests that these earlier models were all concentrated in 2.Kompanie although we have been able to confirm that nine of the company's tanks were later models. The third company - universally referred to throughout the battalion as the heavy company although its official designation was medium - was equipped with Pzkw IV tanks. These were received piecemeal and by the time the battalion left for Russia on 9 June, only the vehicles armed with the short barrelled 75mm L/24 gun - probably as few as four - were ready. It should also be mentioned that Hauptsturmführer Herbert Oeck's 3.Kompanie of SS-Panzerjäger-Abteilung 5, equipped with twelve Marder II tank destroyers, was later attached to the battalion as an unofficial fourth company.

On 18 June 1942 the available tanks of the battalion arrived at the front and by the following day all unloading had been completed. The battalion staff with the tanks of 1.Kompanie and the few heavy tanks of 3.Kompanie were quartered at Amvrosiivka in modern day Ukraine - about 40km south-east of Donetsk - while 2.Kompanie was nearby at Vasylivka (8).

On 20 June Mühlenkamp made the short trip to the division's headquarters in the village of Usipienka where the battalion and regimental commanders were addressed by Gruppenführer Felix Steiner who emphasised that his officers needed to use the limited time available to them to further train and acclimatise the men under their command as the division could be ordered into action any day. Tragically, that very afternoon, the commander of the tank battalion's second company, Theodor von Staden, was killed in a training accident. On 29 June, the day after Blau I commenced, Steiner inspected the Panzer battalion and announced that their days of training were nearing an end.

On 16 July elements of the division moved towards the front. Due to a lack of sufficient transport and a general shortage of fuel, it was necessary for SS-Infanterie-Regiment Westland and the third battalion of SS-Infanterie-Regiment Nordland to relinquish most of their motor vehicles to a battle group composed of the Germania regiment and the remaining two battalions of the Nordland regiment. Indeed, so severe was the shortage that it was decided that the Westland regiment should be held in reserve around Mokroyelanchyk, near the present day border between Ukraine and Russia.

By 19 July the Soviet lines around Taganrog had been quickly breached and the division prepared for the advance on Rostov just 40 kilometres to the east. For the coming battle the Wiking units available for deployment were renamed Gefechtsgruppe Steiner and organised into three battle groups formed around the first battalion of SS-Infanterie-Regiment Germania and the first and second battalions of SS-Infanterie-Regiment Nordland. These battle groups, or Kampfgruppen, took their names from the battalion commanders - Sturmbannführer August Dieckmann, Sturmbannführer Rüdiger Weitzdörfer and Sturmbannführer Arnold Stoffers respectively. In support of his three battle groups Steiner could also call on other elements of his division, most importantly Mühlenkamp's SS-Panzer-Abteilung 5 and an artillery group commanded by Sturmbannführer Karl Schlamelcher consisting of the third battalion of SS-Artillerie-Regiment 5 and the regiment's 10. Batterie. Together with 13. Panzer-Division, Gefechtsgruppe Steiner was ordered to advance towards Rostov but was again hampered by a paucity of transport and of the three infantry battalions only Dieckmann's would be used in the coming operation.

To augment his battle group Dieckmann was given command over Mühlenkamp's Panzer battalion and Schlamelcher and his gunners. In addition parts of the division's reconnaissance, anti-aircraft, engineer, supply units and the tank destroyers of SS-Panzerjäger-Abteilung 5 were placed under Dieckmann's control. This force represented a fraction of the authorised strength of a motorised infantry division and was in fact comprised of those units under Steiner's command which were able to keep up with the tanks. Nevertheless on 20 July a river crossing was made at Sambek on the Taganrog-Rostov road, and Dieckmann's men captured their initial objective of Hill 116.9 to the east of the town. During the hours of darkness Mühlenkamp's battalion was able to link up with units of 13. Panzer-Division south-east of Aleksandrovka over 30 kilometres from their start point. On the following day, with the tank battalion in the lead, Dieckmann's battle group was ordered to advance as far as possible towards the east, guarding the northern flank of XXXIX. Gebirgs-Armee Korps and by nightfall was just west of Stoyanov after encountering only light resistance. On 22 July the Wiking units were at Sultan Saly just 10 kilometres from the outer suburbs of Rostov and with the assistance of the dive bombers of Stukageschwader 77, stormed the trenches which formed the third defensive line north of the city securing the position by 10 pm that evening. In the early hours of Thursday, 23 July the infantry pushed forward and by sunrise the tank battalion advanced towards Leninavan - today a northern suburb of Rostov - where they encountered a large anti-tank ditch. The division's engineers were called upon to fill the ditch and did so, at first with explosive charges and later with shovels and the photographs shown on page 28 were taken at that time. However by late morning the Russian resistance

had hardened considerably and Dieckmann, who had lost contact with 13. Panzer-Division, found his lead elements engaged in a fierce firefight. Denied air support the Wiking units were forced to rely on their meagre artillery force to attempt to blast a way through. Now, at about 11.00 am, a Luftwaffe reconnaissance aircraft which happened to be in the area advised Dieckmann that although the Russian positions around Leninavan and to the north-east were heavily defended the area to his south towards the Chaltyr-Rostov road was almost totally unmanned and the bridge 5 kilometres outside the city appeared to be unguarded. Wasting no time Dieckmann ordered his vanguard to keep the Russians busy and climbing onto Mühlenkamp's command tank, directed him to take his battalion due south until they met the road and then turn east and capture the bridge. Racing through a Balka, or hollow, and an anti-tank ditch - parts of which survive to this day - the tanks of SS-Panzer-Abteilung 5 reached their objective in under 20 minutes. Leaving a squad of engineers to deal with any explosive charges that may have been left on the bridge Mühlenkamp's tanks and a company of infantry pushed towards the east and then wheeled north taking the Russians, who were still engaged with Dieckmann's leading infantry, in the rear.

By 2.00 pm on 24 July Dieckmann was able to observe the anti-tank ditch on the edge of the city of Rostov. Immediately behind this the Russians had barricaded themselves into the houses of the outer suburbs but as they had no anti-tank weapons Mühlenkamp's companies were able to push forward with little difficulty, firing directly into the windows. Under the covering fire offered by the advancing tanks, the infantrymen of the Germania regiment were able to pass through the ditch and occupy a number of buildings. While the engineers attempted to create a passage through the ditch another infantry group, which had until now been held in reserve, fought their way into the city bringing the forward observers of Sturmbannführer Schlamelcher's artillery with them who now proceeded to direct fire onto the fleeing Soviets. By late afternoon the ditch had been filled and the infantry and tanks had advanced to within sight of the Rostov-Glavny railway station and were able to observe the Russian positions at Bataysk on the far side of the Don. At around 7.00 pm Sturmbannführer Mühlenkamp, who had been tasked with securing the road and rail bridges which ran through Rostov from north to south and crossed the Zelyony island in the Don, made contact with units of 13. Panzer-Division which were fighting their way through the city from the north-east. For his actions on this day Mühlenkamp would receive the Ritterkreuz. The two battle groups made up from the battalions of the Nordland regiment, who it will be remembered were almost completely without motor transport, occupied the former enemy positions around Leninavan and Rostov was declared secured although sporadic fighting would continue for several days.



Taken from the same sequence of photographs that show the tanks of SS-Panzer-Regiment 5 negotiating the anti-tank defences outside Rostov-on-Don, this image depicts what are almost certainly men of Sturmbannführer August Dieckmann's first battalion of the Germania infantry regiment, part of the Kampfgruppe that helped to capture the city. Typical of the Waffen-SS soldier at this stage of the war, these NCOs exhibit many of the uniform details discussed in the illustration section.

The next phase of the operation would entail the destruction of the Russian defences between Bataysk and Koisug on the southern edge of Rostov and then an advance of almost 100 kilometres to the crossings of the Kuban river, the next major natural obstacle. For the immediate future the division's assets were organised into a battle group under the control of Oberführer Herbert Gille, the commander of SS-Artillery-Regiment 5, made up of Weitzdörfer's and Stoffers' battalions of the Nordland regiment - who had taken no part in the fighting up to now - Dieckmann's first battalion of the Germania regiment, Mühlenkamp's tank battalion, a company of SS-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 5, a company of SS-Pionier-Bataillon 5 and the surviving Marder II tank destroyers from the Panzerjäger battalion. Importantly, in addition to signals and maintenance units, Gille had brought most of the artillery regiment and the 88mm guns of the division's Flak-Abteilung with him.

Over the next 72 hours the Russian positions were pummelled by Stukageschwader 77 and bombarded by the guns of over forty artillery batteries as German units arrived in Rostov. In the early hours of Tuesday, 28 July Gille's Kampfgruppe moved forward, led by the Panzer battalion, and by 3.30pm that afternoon the Germans had completely cleared the southern bank of the Don. The way to the Caucasus lay open (9).

The next morning, after beating off a half-hearted Russian counterattack, Gille's men moved forward on a broad front led by the available tanks and the Nordland battalions and met little resistance, the Russians seeming to melt away before the German assault often being overtaken by the advancing Panzers. During the evening of 29 July the tanks reached Mechetinskaya, some 80 kilometres to the south-east of Rostov, and by 9.00 am on the following morning Kampfgruppe Gille began the assault on Yegorlykskaya, an important road and rail junction with a military airfield. Here the Soviets held on tenaciously and Ewald Klapdor, who took part in the battle, remembers that "...the Russians had to be smoked out of their holes individually".

By noon the tanks of SS-Panzer-Abteilung 5 had passed through the town and were some 20 kilometres to the south when they were attacked by large numbers of Soviet fighter planes which harassed the helpless armoured vehicles until they were driven off by a squadron of Luftwaffe fighters (10). By the end of the day the Wiking units had advanced over 35 kilometres and the division's reconnaissance battalion was able to make contact with advanced units of 11. Panzer-Division which had crossed the River Manych much further to the east.

On 30 July Gille was informed that Russian cavalry patrols operating in his rear had been able to cut off supplies to his Kampfgruppe and although he directed a force towards Yegorlykskaya with orders to destroy the enemy, all units were forced to hold their positions for the next 48 hours until fuel supplies could be brought forward. On 31 July, the men of the Wiking division encountered their first camel emphasising the fact that they were leaving Europe and that Asia lay ahead. The weather too was changing, becoming noticeably warmer and more humid, with Obersturmführer Klapdor recalling that the men's clothing "...became more and more loose fitting. Frequently, the trousers were the only thing worn".

By the morning of 1 August, Gille had obtained enough fuel to get his Kampfgruppe moving again. Just before noon the rear elements came under small arms fire and despite the fact that the Germans were able to overcome the Russians with relative ease, Gille was disturbed to find that the enemy force had consisted of over one hundred men. Although German casualties were light Sturmbannführer Karl Schlamelcher, the highly experienced officer who had commanded the artillery group during the battles for Rostov, had

been seriously wounded and would take no further part in the fighting. A reconnaissance aircraft was able to confirm that the town of Belaya Glina, which lay ahead, was being fortified by an enemy force which appeared to be from the same unit that had ambushed the Wiking column and Gille, normally a calm and considered man, directed that the Russian troops in the town be annihilated. By 2.00 pm a company of Mühlenkamp's tanks were attacking Belaya Glina from the north while the remaining companies and most of the artillery regiment were advancing from the south and south-west. With the artillery firing at ranges of less than 1,000 metres, the battle for the town lasted for three hours and at the end almost half the Russian garrison were taken prisoner together with all their artillery and transport, the latter consisting of a large number of US Lend-Lease trucks. Incredibly after such an intense, albeit short, battle much of the town remained undamaged and the inhabitants offered the Germans food while a delegation of former Tsarist officers, complete with uniforms and medals, greeted Oberführer Gille and his staff.

On 2 August Gille sent a small group to occupy the village of Novopokrovskaya, roughly 25 kilometres to the south-west of Belaya Glina, as a preparatory move to attacking towards Kropotkin and a crossing of the Kuban. Once again the greater part of Gille's force was rendered immobile by a lack of fuel, this time due to a partisan ambush near Sredniy Yegorlyk during the previous evening. Meanwhile Gruppenführer Steiner had rejoined the division and in conference with Gille decided that a frontal assault on Kropotkin would be too costly and that perhaps another crossing of the Kuban could be found. After studying the available aerial photographs they considered that the area around Grigoripolisskaya, some 30 kilometres south-east of Kropotkin, offered a possible alternative. Here the river banks were easily scaled being only a few metres high and both sides of the river were concealed by woods. A crossing here would also outflank the Russian garrison in Kropotkin.

During the night Steiner split his force into two Kampfgruppen based on the Germania and Nordland regiments and in the early hours of 3 August both groups moved off and by 1.00 pm the Germania Kampfgruppe had reached Grigoripolisskaya launching an attack against the town later in the afternoon. However, the Russians had earlier made contact with the Nordland group near Dmitrijevskaya, some 30 kilometres north-east of Kropotkin, and as the element of surprise had been lost Steiner called off the assault. During the evening it was decided to return to the original plan of a direct assault on the crossings at Kropotkin. Both battalions of the Nordland regiment with the Panzerjäger company and the bulk of the tanks supported by an artillery group would capture Kropotkin and the two bridges across the river while the Germania group continued to occupy the enemy around Grigoripolisskaya. This meant that the Nordland Kampfgruppe would have to advance the 30 kilometres to the Kuban against an enemy that was already forewarned and by Kavkazskaya, just 10 kilometres short of their objective, the Soviet resistance began to harden. Nevertheless by 10.00 am Sturmbannführer Stoffers' battalion with 2. Kompanie of the Panzer battalion was just 500 metres from the edge of the town while Sturmbannführer Weitzdörfer's men supported by 1. Kompanie were fighting in the northern suburbs. As Standartenführer Fritz von Scholz, the Kampfgruppe commander, was observing the progress of his men with some satisfaction an officer of the reconnaissance platoon raced up to inform him that a column of Russian infantry was approaching from the north-west, directly behind Weitzdörfer's group. Desperately attempting to organise a defence against this new threat Scholz ordered the third company of the tank battalion, which he had been holding in reserve, to move to the northern end of Kropotkin picking up whatever infantrymen they could on the way. With the second company, and as many of the nearby riflemen as he could



Above: This Pzkw IV ausf F2 of 3. Kompanie may have been photographed around Malgobek which Obersturmführer Ewald Klapdor described as largely obscured by high corn fields and dominated by ridges unlike the flatter terrain to the north. In any case the date must be after 3 August 1942 when the company's six L/43 armed tanks joined the battalion. This vehicle is also shown in the illustration on the outside back cover.

Below: A Pzkw III of SS-Panzer-Abteilung 5 photographed early in the campaign amid the rolling grassland of the northern Caucasus. Darker patches of camouflage can be discerned on the hull front and the division's unit insignia is clearly visible on the left hand side mudguard. The halftack in the background is depicted in the illustration on page 13.



gather, Scholz made an attempt to take the bridge on the eastern side of the town by storm and by 11.00 am his men had reached the railway station, within sight of their objective. Just fifteen minutes later a huge explosion rocked the earth, followed within seconds by another as both bridges were destroyed. Although their mission could not now possibly be completed Scholz's Kampfgruppe remained in the area until the following morning when they made their way south towards Grigoripolisskaya.

Meanwhile, as the bridges were being blown at Kropotkin, a company of Dieckmann's Germania group had succeeded in crossing the river in rubber rafts and establishing a small bridgehead on the far bank of the Kuban at Grigoripolisskaya. On the following morning, after learning of the failure at Kropotkin, Steiner ordered that all efforts were to be concentrated here. The Russians fought stubbornly but by 6 August the engineers of LVII. Panzerkorps had managed to construct a bridge capable of supporting the division's tanks and heavy equipment. By this time the bridgehead had been expanded to such an extent that the second battalion of the Germania regiment was able to slip across during the night to join Dieckmann's first battalion which had been struggling to hold on. At 4.00 am the following morning, preceded by an aerial bombardment and a artillery barrage, the Germans broke out of their bridgehead and in the process captured the Russian guns which had pounded them during the last few days. By 4.30 am the remainder of the division was crossing the river with Mühlenkamp's tanks in the lead carrying the infantrymen of the Nordland regiment's 5. Kompanie.

Once across the Kuban, the flat terrain allowed the mobile units to race ahead and on Saturday, 8 August elements of the division reached the Laba River, almost 60 kilometres west of their start point at Grigoripolisskaya and the last natural obstacle before the oilfields of Maykop. In temperatures that soared to 42 degrees the Nordland and Germania battle groups attempted crossings at Temirgoyevskaya and Petropavlovskaya while the Panzer battalion reached the river further to the west at Tenginskaya.

With the demolition of the Temirgoyevskaya bridge Steiner ordered Dieckmann to move this battle group to the west to Tenginskaya to support Mühlenkamp's tanks which appeared to have the best hope of success and although the Russians were able to destroy the bridge here, the divisional engineers succeeded in constructing a crossing during the night of 9 and 10 August. At the same time, further to the east, Maykop fell to 13. Panzer-Division and units of Brandenburg commandos, the latter disguised as Soviet NKVD troops. Now reinforced by the Nordland group Steiner's men set off at a break neck pace covering 35 kilometres and reaching the town of Belorechenskaya on the Belaya river, a tributary of the Kuban, some 20 kilometres north-west of Maykop before halting for the night. Expecting to take Belorechenskaya with little effort the Wiking units were surprised to encounter large numbers of Soviet troops which had in fact been pushed towards the west by the advance of 13. Panzer-Division and were forced to defend their positions north of the town. On 12 August, at 7.00 pm, the second battalion of the Nordland regiment set off to cross the Belaya with the first battalion following in support. Moving their vehicles in the dark proved too difficult however and both battalions advanced on foot with the artillery group covering their crossing of the river which, in most places, was little more than a metre deep. Just after midnight Sturmbannführer Stoffers reported that his second battalion had established a secure bridgehead on the western bank of the Belaya, fighting off a counterattack at 1.30 am. As the sun rose at about 4.00 am the Germans were greeted by the sight of a large Russian cavalry detachment approaching from the direction of Zarechny. From concealed positions, in the half light of dawn, firing every available weapon, the Germans were able to almost annihilate the unfortunate cavalymen. By 6.00 am Weitzdörfer's first battalion with all their vehicles and the artillery group were crossing the river. On 12 August the Westland regiment and the third battalion of the Nordland regiment rejoined the division and on the same day advance units reached the Maykop oilfields which were in fact some distance from the city. Within two days the division was holding defensive positions in an arc with its furthest points some 45 kilometres to the west and south-west of Maykop. Now operating with all three battalions the Nordland regiment was at Kabardinskaya in the foothills of the Caucasus at the arcs western tip. The two battalions of the Germania regiment secured the front as far as Apseronsk while the Westland battalion was dug in around Samurskaya on the Pshekh river. On 14 August Steiner was informed that his men were to hold their positions and wait for the infantry divisions of XXXIV. Armee Korps which were two days march away.

Apart from light skirmishing the division spent the remainder of August and much of September holding the ground captured in the preceding weeks, gradually being relieved by Army units. On 15 September Steiner received notification that his division was to move through Maykop and Armavir to Georgiyevsk near Partigorsk to replace a Slovenian division which had been earmarked to take part in the next stage of the offensive aimed ultimately at capturing the oilfields at Grozny. The division would be subordinated to General Eugen Ott's LI. Armee Korps. By the evening of 24 September the last elements of the division had taken up their positions along the Terek river and spent the following day clearing the ridge in front of Malgobek and Inarki to eliminate a number of Russian guns. At 5.00 am on 26 September, after a brief artillery barrage, the German attack went forward with the first battalion of the Nordland regiment running into at least four Russian battalions which had been preparing for their own attack timed to begin at 5.30 am.

The young commander of 1. Kompanie, Obersturmführer Tunner, was killed immediately as was his counterpart from 3. Kompanie Hauptsturmführer Bluhm with two of his platoon leaders. Within thirty minutes the attack of 3. Kompanie - now almost leaderless and reduced to just over half its strength - ground to a halt. A regimental staff officer, Obersturmführer Körner, who had been sent forward to take command was wounded along the way. The regiment's third battalion, under Obersturmbannführer Hans Collani, had also run into stiff resistance and by 8.30 am had effectively stopped and only the second battalion was making any progress. By late morning however Untersturmführer Richard Spörle had assumed command of 1. Kompanie and the battalion adjutant, Obersturmbannführer Michael Thöny, had managed to reach 3. Kompanie and taken charge. Both company's returned to the offensive and encouraged by their example Collani prepared his battalion for another effort. At 11.30 am, 11. Kompanie - supported by infantry and anti-tank guns - attacked towards Malgobek and Sagopshi. Throughout the day Collani urged his men forward until at 4.15 pm, with their objective just metres away, he conceded that they could go no further and ordered his battalion to pull back.

Earlier that day, at 7.00 am, the second battalion of the Westland regiment under Sturmbannführer Kurt Kummer, supported by Hauptsturmführer Oeck's Marder II self-propelled guns and Mühlenkamp's tanks, attacked towards Nizhny Kurp 10 kilometres west of Malgobek. Although it was planned that Hans Flügel's 2. Kompanie would lead the assault, the commander of the Panzer battalion's first company, Obersturmführer Günther Schnabel, requested that his men have the honour of leading the attack as it was his birthday. Advancing steadily the tanks reached a deep anti-tank ditch and although the accompanying engineers managed to fill it by 10.00 am, the first tank to cross was immediately hit and began to burn (11).

Four agonising hours passed while the engineers worked under heavy enemy fire to create another crossing in the ditch during which time the company lost a further two of its precious tanks - to mines according to one source. In his account of the action Hauptsturmführer Oeck mentioned that two tanks of Schnabel's company were lost to what he described as bundled charges, presumably carried by Russian infantrymen, and these may be the same vehicles. By 2.00 pm the surviving five tanks of Schnabel's company were crossing the ditch and as the last vehicle gained the southern side, Flügel's company moved forward firing high explosive rounds directly into the Russian trenches. Behind 2. Kompanie the infantry of the Westland battalion poured across the ditch and as darkness approached the Germans were half way to Sagopshi. When the tank battalion moved forward that morning there were five Pzkw II, eleven Pzkw III with the short L42 gun and twenty-three with the longer L/60, three Pzkw IV Ausf F and six Pzkw IV Ausf G2 on hand.

During the evening of 26 September Steiner's headquarters received orders that the division was to advance again the following morning clearing the area around Sagopshi, also the securing the villages of Inarki - Jeskem in German accounts - and Psedekh that provided the way for an attack towards the area between Nizhniye Achaluki and Verkhniye Achaluki about 15 kilometres to the south-east. The division was also to hold back enough tanks to support an attack by 111. Infanterie-Division from Sagopshi towards Malgobek. In the event the attack bogged down under heavy enemy artillery fire which blasted Mühlenkamp's tanks in the flat, open terrain that offered almost no cover. In the afternoon Soviet bombers and ground attack aircraft joined the battle and by 5.15 pm Steiner was reporting to corps headquarters that his division was under attack by twenty to thirty enemy aeroplanes and that the four Luftwaffe fighters that were attempting to intercept them were wholly inadequate. Added to this, artillery fire was coming from inside Malgobek which was still held by the Russians. Just before dark Steiner reported that he had been able to make little headway but would prepare an attack for the next day suggesting that the high ground of Malgobek be the main objective. The corps headquarters however reminded Steiner that his orders of 26 September remained in force and that the main thrust of the attack was to be made towards Nizhniye Achaluki to the south-east of Malgobek and Sagopshi and Malgobek were still in enemy hands. Incredibly the message from corps headquarters went on to state that ammunition was to be used sparingly. Accepting the situation Steiner planned to have 1. Kompanie of the Panzer battalion with most of the Westland regiment storm Sagopshi while 2. Kompanie raced down the Sagopshi - Nizhniye Achaluki road taking advantage of the early morning fog which was common at this time of year. At dawn on 28 September the attack went forward, however as soon as the fog cleared the avalanche of artillery fire that had halted the division on the previous day began again. As visibility increased Mühlenkamp realised to his horror that his entire battalion was sitting between Malgobek and Sagopshi and more than eighty Russian T34 and Valentine tanks were advancing towards him (12).

In a ferocious battle the forty Wiking tanks were able to halt the Russians but not without losses including Untersturmführer Hans Köntopp, Mühlenkamp's signals officer. The battalion commander himself was forced to abandon two tanks that day and we can only assume that one was the sole Befehlspanzer that SS-Panzer-Abteilung 5 possessed. Although the tank battalion had advanced to the east as ordered they found that as darkness approached they were cut off from the division by a blocking position that the Russians had been able to establish in their rear. In addition many tanks had been separated from their platoon and company commands and spent that night and a large part of the next day fighting their way back.

HEERESGRUPPE SÜD

2.Armeel

4.Panzerarmee

Heeresgruppe A

KHARKOV

6.Armeel

Krasnograd

Izyum

1.Panzerarmee

Heeresgruppe B

Zaporozhye

17.Armeel

Amvrosiika

Sambek

Mariupol

Taganrog

Melitopol

ROSTOV

Bataysk

Aleksandrovka

Pavlovskaya

Saisk

Belaya Glina

Tikhoretsk

Kropotkin

Grigoripolisskaya

Tenginskaya

Armavir

Krasnodar

Belorechenskaya

Maykop

11.Armeel

Novorossisk

Taupse

Heeresgruppe A

Pyatigorsk

Mozduk

Nizhniy Kurp

Malgobek

Grozny

Ordzhonikidzevskaya

Beslan

Dzuarikau

ASTRAKAN

CASPIAN SEA

SEA OF AZOV

BLACK SEA

Many of the towns shown here were mere villages in 1942 and for the convenience of the reader we have endeavoured to use modern place names. In many locations the front changed from day to day and is shown in at its furthest extent and it should be noted that the entire line from the Terek River north of Grozny to the Volga south of Stalingrad was held by weak patrols only.

FALL BLAU

OPERATIONS IN THE CAUCASUS, JUNE - NOVEMBER 1942

When Fall Blau commenced on Sunday, 28 June 1942 the Axis forces operating or positioned south of the Bryansk-Oryol area were under the control of Heeresgruppe Süd commanded by Generalfeldmarschall I Fedor von Bock. On 9 July the southern army group was split into two separate commands as Heeresgruppe A under Generalfeldmarschall Wilhelm List with 1.Panzerarmee, 11.Armeel, 17.Armeel and 4th Romanian Army and Heeresgruppe B, commanded by General-Oberst Maximilian von Weichs and comprising 4.Panzerarmee, 2.Armeel, 6.Armeel with 2nd Hungarian Army and 8th Italian Army. The drive into the Caucasus undertaken by Heeresgruppe A was codenamed Edelweiss while the advance of Heeresgruppe B towards Stalingrad was named Fischreiher.

Limit of German Advance
18 November, 1942

0 25 50 100 150 200

On the following morning the attacks continued and the first battalion of the Nordland regiment with the second battalion from the Westland regiment managed to take Inarki to the south-west of Sagopshi by 5.00 pm, albeit with heavy casualties. The division was able to make no headway at all on 30 September and as the day ended Steiner once again made his opinion known to the 111.Armeekorps headquarters that Malgobek should be the main objective and that further, unless air superiority was achieved and the enemy's artillery eliminated the chances of an attack towards the east succeeding were slim. Once again the corps commander directed Steiner to follow his original orders and that night the third battalion of the Nordland regiment moved into the front line, preparing for an all out effort. The tank battalion would also be available after Obersturmführer Sobota's maintenance platoon had worked feverishly to repair those vehicles which had been damaged in the preceding days (13).

In attack after attack the Wiking units - supported by Oberst Louis Tronnier's Infanterie-Regiment 70, detached from 111.Infanterie-Division - threw themselves at the Soviet strong points of Sagopshi and Malgobek. The division's losses were heavy and for the first five days of the operation the infantry were obliged to conduct their attacks without air support or even the benefit of heavy weapons. Pushed beyond endurance Steiner threatened to take his complaints to Reichsführer-SS Himmler and his actions may have resulted in the impressive forty-five batteries of artillery which were assembled for the attack scheduled for 4.30am on the morning of 5 October. Finally, on Tuesday, 6 October both positions were taken.

The following days were spent in organising the division for a further push to the east although all units were badly under strength. By 14 October, when Hauptsturmführer Franz Hack's third battalion of the Germania regiment

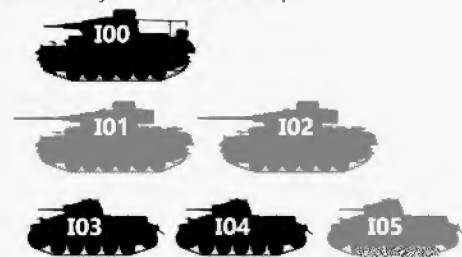
finally rejoined the division, the Panzer battalion was almost held just ten tanks while most of the infantry companies were reduced to between thirty or forty men. Nevertheless Steiner's division would be called upon to fight off almost continuous Russian counter attacks while mounting their own assault on Rostov 107, a natural feature to the north of Malgobek against strong opposition including heavy KV-1 tanks against which the guns of the Panzer battalion were almost useless (14).

During the last week of October the Wiking division moved into the area around Verkhiny Kurp and Nizhniy Kurp, further to the west where semi-permanent living quarters had been built including dug outs for the tanks. Tellingly, as early as 12 October, Army headquarters had been issuing orders concerning preparations for the coming winter. On 11 November the division was renamed 5.SS-Panzergründier-Division Wiking although, with the exception of the addition of a battalion of Finnish volunteers, this was a change in name only. During the second week of November, as snow began falling, elements of the division managed to fight their way through to 13.Panzer-Division that had been encircled near Nizhnyaya Saniba, due south of Beslan, with the help of a Luftwaffe Flak-Abteilung and their 88 mm guns. This however was the end of offensive operations although the division had penetrated as far south as the village of Dzuarikau on the Terek, to the south-west of the massive oilfields of Grozny. The men of the Wiking division had covered over 1,000 kilometres, fighting almost every foot of the way. The focus of attention had now shifted to Stalingrad where 6.Armeel was cut off and although the first battalion of the Nordland regiment had been slated for a relief attempt this was abandoned by Christmas Eve and the division, with the survivors of 13.Panzer-Division, went into the prepared defensive positions of the Cesar Line just south of the site of their spectacular success at Rostov.

SS-PANZER-ABTEILUNG 5, JULY 1942

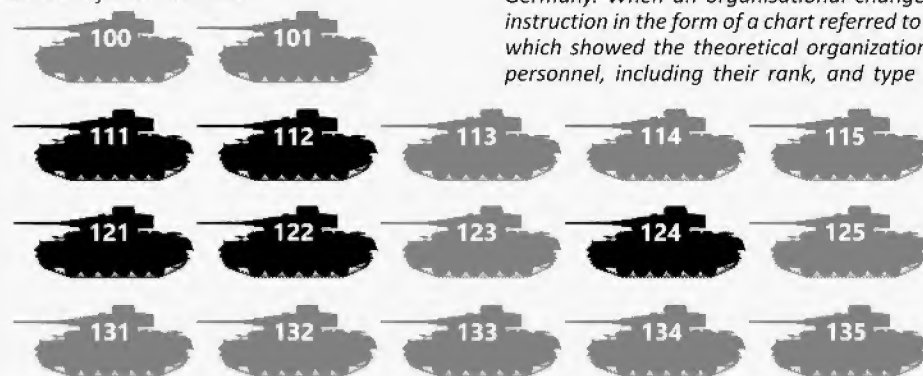
Stabskompanie

Sturmabführer Mühlenkamp



1.Kompanie (leichte)

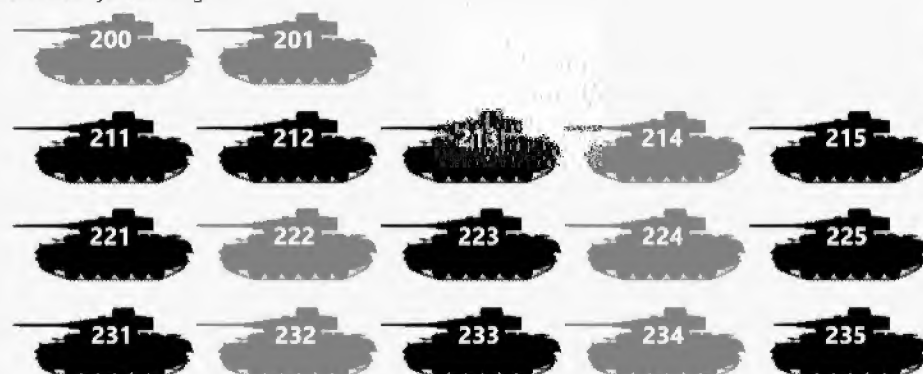
Obersturmführer Schnabel



2.Kompanie (leichte)

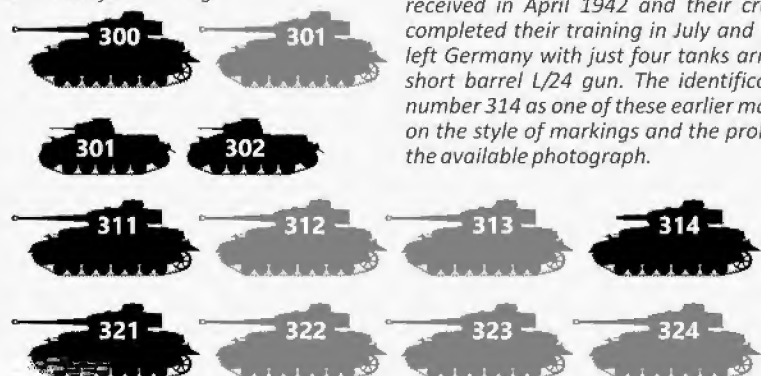
Obersturmführer von Staden

Obersturmführer Flügel



3.Kompanie (mittlere)

Obersturmführer Darges



Although the headquarters would normally have been organised using KStN 1150 Stabskompanie einer Panzer-Abteilung of 1 November 1941 and KStN 1178(Sa) Staffel einer Panzer-Abteilung of 1 February 1941, the lack of suitable vehicles meant that the battalion's staff element was organised as shown here in July 1942 with just a quarter of its authorised strength. The reader should note that the turret numbers shown here are slightly conjectural but more than likely and the vehicles shown as a black silhouette have been confirmed by photographic evidence.

At far right: A Pzkw III ausf J late model tank armed with the long barrel L/60 main gun photographed while negotiating one of the anti-tank ditches outside Rostov. The division's Sonnenrad unit insignia is clearly visible on the mudguard nearest the camera. The commander of this tank may be Obersturmführer Ewald Klapdor who was at that time the Zugführer of the first company's second platoon.

During the Barbarossa campaign of 1941 the units of the Waffen-SS, although often criticised by the Army for their willingness to accept high casualties, had more than proved their worth in battle. Before the end of the year it was decided that the Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler, Reich, Totenkopf and Wiking divisions would be augmented by the addition of a Panzer-Abteilung raising their status to that of motorised infantry formations. Equipping and manning these new battalions would however take some time and by February 1942 just two had been partially raised. Indeed, the required vehicles were in such short supply that the second battalion began its initial training on captured French tanks and even the final organisation of both presented a somewhat ad-hoc appearance when compared to the official charts of organisation - or Kriegsstärkenachweisung - current at the time.

All units of the German Army were organised according to detailed instructions and memoranda issued by the Oberkommando des Heeres, or OKH - the high command of the army. These were referred to as Allgemeine Heeresmitteilungen - or General Army orders. Similar in concept to government Gazettes, they were issued twice each month to advise of any procedural changes, new uniform regulations, the award of decorations - in fact all aspects governing the day to day running of the army in the field and in Germany. When an organisational change was made the orders were accompanied by a detailed instruction in the form of a chart referred to as Kriegsstärkenachweisung - usually abbreviated to KStN - which showed the theoretical organization and composition of a unit, listing the exact number of personnel, including their rank, and type of vehicle or equipment allocated down to small arms.

The various KStN issued throughout the war could be identified by a number and date. Somewhat confusingly, it seems that as several of the newer Kriegsstärkenachweisungen were issued they appropriated the number of the instruction that they were intended to replace and therefore the date is all important. In addition, units of the Waffen-SS received instructions from the SS-Führungshauptamt, or SS Main Office. Under the command of Sturmabführer Mühlenkamp, SS-Panzer-Abteilung 5 was actually the second Waffen-SS tank battalion to be formed and was originally intended for the SS-Division (mot) Reich but was allocated to the Wiking division in February 1942. The battalion was made up of two light companies and a medium company and based on KStN 1171 leichte Panzer-Kompanie and KStN 1175 mittlere Panzer-Kompanie both dated 1 November 1941. The battalion's two light companies were equipped with Pzkw III tanks - where possible the ausf J model armed with the longer L/60 gun when these became available after December 1941. Although both companies had their full complement of seventeen Pzkw III vehicles, both lacked the authorised Leichte Zug of five Pzkw II light tanks, at this stage of the war used for reconnaissance. The third, medium company was authorised three platoons of four Pzkw IV tanks each however battalions raised in late 1941 and early 1942 contained only two platoons with an additional two medium tanks with the company headquarters giving a total of ten, as shown here. The third company's light platoon contained just two Pzkw II tanks instead of the authorised five.



A QUESTION OF COLOUR

That non-standard camouflage patterns were in widespread use on the Eastern front during the summer of 1942 has been proven beyond doubt by the number of surviving photographs of armoured vehicles made in both monochrome and colour. However at what level of command these colours were authorised and their exact shade is far from certain. Considering which colours were available at the time may allow an educated guess to be made but before adopting any conclusions, or even opinions, it would perhaps be helpful to examine both the RAL colour system and the Heeresmitteilungen - or Army orders - the two main factors which determined German armoured vehicle camouflage throughout the 1939-45 period.

In 1925 a committee made up of German business concerns and government authorities founded the Reichs-Ausschuss für Lieferbedingungen und Gütesicherung - which can be loosely translated as the Commission for Delivery Terms and Quality Assurance and abbreviated to RAL - with a view to regulating various standards of practice and manufacturing. Of primary interest to our study is the system of colour coding adopted in 1927 by the commission and named RAL 840. This system allowed exact matches of colour to be obtained merely by quoting a number whereas previously it had been necessary to provide samples or colour swatches to a paint manufacturer who would then attempt to match the colour and shade. Originally consisting of just forty different colours, by the third year of the war the system had grown so large as to become unwieldy and underwent a change whereby each colour was given a four digit number - the first digit indicating the basic shade of the colour - and renamed RAL Farbtonregister 840-R. The system underwent further changes between 1953 and 1961 and emerged as RAL 840-HR and although certain numbers and names were retained, many now described colours which were significantly different to those used during the war. The system has grown today to include thousands of colours but again, it should not be assumed that the modern names bear any relationship to the colours they described in 1945 (see note 1). When ordering paint or stipulating a particular colour the German Army, like any other government agency, would use the RAL code.

Twice each month General Army orders - or Allgemeine Heeresmitteilungen - were issued to announce important measures related to the Heer including changes to uniform regulations, awards, discipline, training methods, replacements and even the morale of the troops. Most importantly for our study they stipulated the colours and methods by which vehicles, guns and buildings were to be painted. As a matter of interest it should be noted that while these orders announced organisational changes they did not detail those changes and further instructions were issued as separate documents known as

Kriegsstärkenachweisung, usually abbreviated to K.st.N, which were not produced on a regular basis but only as required. In addition, Heeres-Verordnungsblatt were issued to advise of less important changes and indicative of their mostly mundane nature was the fact that these documents were not considered restricted material as Heeresmitteilungen were.

From the commencement of Operation Barbarossa until February 1943, the official colour scheme for German army vehicles operating in the Soviet Union was a dark grey colour referred to as Dunkelgrau. The practice of using a single colour was standardised by Heeresmitteilung (HM) Nr.864 dated 31 July 1940 and the intended shade was presumably Dunkelgrau Nr. 46 - although this is only implied in the original document (2). Prior to that date a disruptive camouflage pattern made up of Dunkelgrau Nr. 46 and Dunkelbraun Nr. 45 had been in use since November 1938 and possibly earlier (3). On 10 February 1942, in a change that affected the entire colour standard, Dunkelgrau Nr.46 was renamed Dunkelgrau RAL 7021 and is often referred to today as Schwartzgrau - the familiar Panzer Grey (4). Interestingly the opening sentence of the official order states that the adoption of a single colour camouflage was intended to save paint.

With the commitment of forces to North Africa in early 1941 it was very quickly realised that the dark grey camouflage would be a decided disadvantage in the terrain in which the tanks were expected to operate and HM Nr.281 dated 17 March 1941 introduced a new scheme utilising Gelbbraun RAL 8000, a medium yellow-brown, and a grey-green shade known as Graugrün RAL 7008. It was intended that RAL 8000 be the predominant colour, covering approximately two-thirds of the surface area and unlike the pre-war camouflage, the edges where the two colours met were to be feathered (5). It should be noted that the order does indeed describe RAL 8000 as Gelbbraun contrary to some accounts which suggest that the colour received its name at a later date.

The despatch of armoured units to North Africa and the resultant need for a desert camouflage scheme had been forced upon the Wehrmacht at such short notice that no experimentation was conducted as to the suitability of these colours and both were in fact in use at the time by the Deutsche Reichsbahn. The two colours were to be obtained by the troops and an extensive list of commercial suppliers was included in the body of the order (6).

In just over a year a new order, HM Nr. 315 dated 25 March 1942, was issued which stipulated the use of two new colours - Braun RAL 8020 and Grau RAL 7027 - to replace those in use in North Africa. These colours were only to be used when existing stocks of RAL 8000 and RAL 7008 were exhausted and there



While it is not possible to determine colour from black and white photographs an examination of the tonal values can sometimes be of some assistance. At left is a Pzkw III of SS-Panzer-Regiment 5 photographed during Fall Blau and at right is a Pzkw IV pictured in North Africa during the summer of 1941. Note that the darker colour visible on the Pzkw III has been sprayed across the Wiking division insignia.

is no way of knowing how gradual the introduction of the new colours may have been. In fact, given the supply situation that the African units faced from the very beginning of the campaign it is highly likely that the majority of the vehicles painted in RAL 8020 and RAL 7027 were either the replacements that arrived after October 1942 and the retreat from El Alamein or the units which were despatched to Tunisia in early 1943.

Officially at least no change had been introduced for those units on active service in the Soviet Union nor those stationed in western and central Europe since 1940 - although it had been realised for some time that the dark grey colour of the Panzers provided less than ideal camouflage on the open plains of western Russia. It was not however until 18 February 1943 that a completely new colour scheme was promulgated for use in Europe and although the introduction of these colours falls outside the remit of this book it should at least be mentioned.

In a complete break with the practice of using dark camouflage colours HM Nr. 181 ordered that all vehicles were now to leave the factories and assembly plants in a colour described simply as dark yellow, or Dunkelgelb nach Muster, as no RAL number had been allocated at the time the order was issued. In addition, the troops would be provided with two camouflage colours - initially RLM Olivgrün and Rotbraun RAL 8017 - in the form of a paste in either 2 or 20 kilogram tins (7).

It was not until the issue of HM Nr.322 on 3 April 1943 that the colour codes Dunkelgelb RAL 7028 and Olivgrün RAL 6033 are first mentioned. The significance of this, for the study of the camouflage patterns used during the summer of 1942 at least, is that Dunkelgelb was a completely new colour in February 1943 and its use in the previous July is extremely unlikely if not impossible. An interesting aspect of this order was the inclusion, for the first time, of a table indicating the exact amount of paint required, by weight, to paint certain types and classes of vehicle or weapon. This may suggest that paint was in short supply or that in the past it had been used uneconomically, quite possibly both.

To return to the question of camouflage colours used during Fall Blau, we have chosen three colour photographs as representative of the evidence available to us. The first depicts a Pzkw III ausf J of Panzer-Regiment 201, the second a Pzkw IV ausf F2 of Panzer-Regiment 36 - both taken in southern Russia during the summer of 1942 - and a Sturmgeschütz III ausf F/8 photographed in Stalingrad (8). The image of the Pzkw III is reproduced on page 16 of the illustration section and the photograph of the Pzkw IV was used as the reference for the artwork on the same page. The photograph of the Pzkw III appeared in a November 1942 edition of Signal magazine and has been reprinted many times. It can be dated to sometime after the first week of August as other images in the same series show the Caucasus mountains in the background. The regiment's parent formation, 23.Panzer-Division, had been formed in France in 1941 and sent to Russia in March 1942 serving with 6.Armee until July when it was transferred to 1.Panzerarmee. As part of 14.Panzer-Division, Panzer-Regiment 36 had served in Russia since the invasion of 1941 and was attached to 1.Panzerarmee in July 1942 moving on to 6.Armee at Stalingrad in November. It has been claimed that the assault gun was one of the vehicles of Sturmgeschütz-Abteilung 242 which although trained and equipped for service in North Africa contributed its second and third batteries to the Stalingrad battles in December 1942 where both were subsequently destroyed. This identification offers a convenient explanation for the very light colour of the vehicle. The photograph must however have been taken well before the two batteries arrived in Russia as snow began falling in the Stalingrad area in late

October 1942 and by December would have covered almost every surface. The vehicle's colour is in fact a close match for the unpainted concrete buildings in the background and even allowing for the vagaries of the colour film stock of the day, lacks the decidedly yellow-brown hue of the African shades tending towards Elfenbein RAL 1001 or Beige RAL 1002, the former intended for armoured vehicle interiors (9). This and the clear lack of snow and the abundant foliage on the visible trees would at least rule out Sturmgeschütz-Abteilung 242 and the proposition that the vehicle was painted specifically for service in the desert (10).

The camouflage applied to the Dunkelgrau base colour of the PzkwIII of Panzer-Regiment 201 appears to have been painted with random lines of what may be Hellgrau RAL 7009, a medium green-grey, overpainted with Braun RAL 8020, the official base colour for vehicles serving in North Africa and Crete at the time. Care has been taken not to cover the division's unit insignia which can be seen on the rear fender. The Pzkw IV of Panzer-Regiment 36 is interesting in that it appears to have been initially painted overall in a light colour which may have been Grau RAL 7003, a lighter shade than Hellgrau RAL 7009, over which Dunkelgrau has been liberally sprayed - leaving little of the lighter colour - with streaks of Rotbraun RAL 8012, a deep, rich red-brown most often used as a primer (11). The latter shade had been a colour used by the German railways as Gelbbraun RAL 8000 and Graugrün RAL 7008, the North Africa camouflage colours stipulated in HM Nr.281.

If interpreting an exact shade from a colour print or transparency made in 1942 is difficult, determining colours from a monochrome image with any certainty is of course impossible. What can however be observed from the series of black and white photographs of the tanks of the Wiking division reproduced in this book is the controlled and uniform manner in which the camouflage colours have been applied and the flawless rendering of tactical and unit insignia. These characteristics can also be noted with the vehicles of units which had been stationed in the relative quiet of rear training areas until the commencement of the summer battles such as Panzer-Regiment 31 of 5.Panzer-Division (12).

What these examples indicate is that by the spring of 1942 the need for either a concealing or disruptive camouflage had at least been acknowledged. Indeed since the earliest days of the Russian campaign and the fighting in Libya, vehicle crews had daubed their tanks with local mud in an effort to blend in with their surroundings. While official orders had existed as a guide to the troops in North Africa since early 1941, units serving in the Soviet Union were forced to improvise based on their appreciation of local conditions and the limited range of colours that were available to them. That the practice was common knowledge is suggested by the adoption of disruptive camouflage by units training in Germany who expected to be posted to Russia such as SS-Panzer-Abteilung 5 (13).

It is however unlikely that any large organisation, in this case the German Army, would have tolerated a situation where individual units were left to decide in what manner and with what colours the vehicles under their control should be painted and which could at best be described as hit and miss with the potential to run to chaotic. Indeed the British army in North Africa had found itself in almost the same situation before introducing strict guidelines in late October 1942 as to which colours and patterns were allowed. It is likely that HM Nr.181 of February 1943 was as much an attempt to introduce some consistency into what had already evolved into an accepted practice as it was to provide a suitable method for camouflage tanks and other vehicles.

1) Similarly there are many colours that were in use during the war where the exact shade is unknown to us today. One of the most important is Dunkelgelb nach Muster, or Dunkelgelb RAL 7028 as it was later known, which has been the source of endless argument and controversy with at least one account claiming that this colour went through five different shades before 1945.

2) The date of this order is often given as 1940 however a surviving copy which the author has been able to examine clearly shows the later date.

3) A detailed analysis of the camouflage patterns during the French campaign is given in our earlier title in this series, Case Yellow: German Armour in the Invasion of France, 1940.

4) We have been unable to find any reference to RAL 7021 as Schwartzgrau in any official wartime documents. The system underwent significant changes between 1953 and 1961 and its later term Schwartzgrau was introduced at this time or perhaps even later. The term Panzergrau is almost certainly a post war invention.

5) Although it is often stated that the pre-war camouflage was not rendered as a hard-edge pattern the relevant order, HM Nr. 687 dated 2 November 1938, makes no mention of the method of application and indeed a number of monochrome photographs exist where the edges of a darker colour are clearly visible.

6) Gelbbraun and Graugrün were used to paint railway cars and certain classes of the Reichsbahn's buildings respectively. Given the extensive railway network within Germany and the occupied countries both these colours were probably in plentiful supply.

7) The Reichsluftfahrtministerium - or RLM - the Ministry of Aviation, maintained its own colour system which was used by units of the Luftwaffe. That the Army found it necessary to venture outside its standard system of supply is perhaps indicative of how little forethought went into the subject of vehicle camouflage.

8) There are in fact a large number of photographs of tanks from this period, both colour and monochrome, where a camouflage pattern or colour is clearly visible however they are essentially the same as those mentioned above making the listing of each unnecessarily repetitious.

9) A list of colours available to army units which probably accompanied one of the official orders has survived the war although it is unfortunately undated. The inclusion of Braun RAL 8020 and Grau RAL 7027 would however suggest that the list was not compiled before March 1942. Of the nineteen colours listed only the two mentioned above and Weiss RAL 9002 - a very light grey - provide reasonable matches. This idea may not be so outlandish as it would first seem when it is considered that the city had been pounded by the artillery of both sides for months and was covered in a coat of concrete rubble and dust.

10) In addition to the batteries of Sturmgeschütz-Abteilung 242, three assault gun units took part in the fighting for the city of Stalingrad - Sturmgeschütz-Abteilungen 177, 244 and 245 all of which had a number of long-barrelled vehicles on hand.

11) That the lighter colour was used as a base is apparent by the residue around the hull vision ports and other areas.

12) Photographs of a number of the regiment's tanks suggest that a dark green colour has been applied in small blotches, sprayed over the Dunkelgrau base colour. Again the individual vehicle number and unit insignia have been very carefully painted. See page 17 of the illustration section.

13) There is no real evidence to support the suggestion that southern Russia was considered to be a tropical zone as an explanation for the adoption of the North African camouflage schemes and colours.

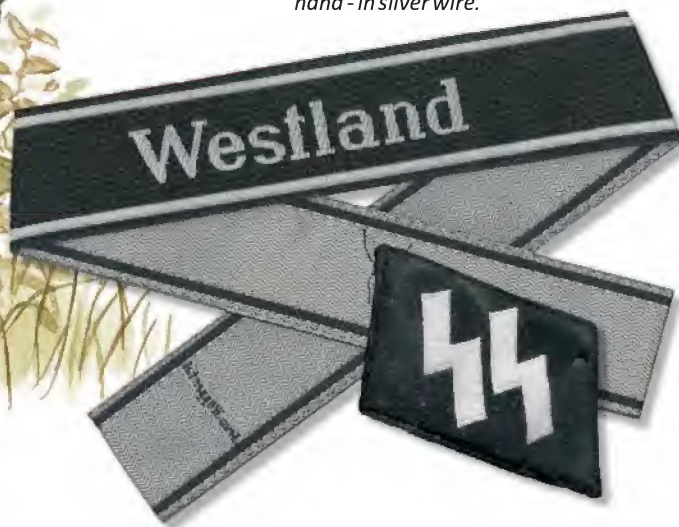
Taken at around the time of the attack on Rostov-on-Don in late July 1942, the photographs on this page depict men of SS-Infanterie-Regiment Germania, quite probably from Sturmbannführer August Dieckmann's first battalion. The method of wearing the camouflage smock, so indicative of Waffen-SS infantrymen, with the collar of the Feldbluse exposed to identify unit and rank, is clearly visible here. As the campaign wore on and temperatures and humidity rose this became less common and often the smock was worn without the heavy, woollen jacket. In his account Ewald Klapdor, who served as a platoon commander with the tank battalion, stated that at the height of the summer only the trousers were worn. The large patch on the side of the helmet cover concealed a spring fitted with a metal hook at its lower end which was fastened over the rim of the helmet holding the cover in place. The camouflage smock and helmet cover shown in the image below are both printed in what is referred to today as the Platanenmuster or Plane Tree pattern and a further example can be seen in the illustration section on page 11.





At left: SS-Sturmmann, SS-Infanterie-Regiment Westland, SS-Division (mot) Wiking. Summer 1942.

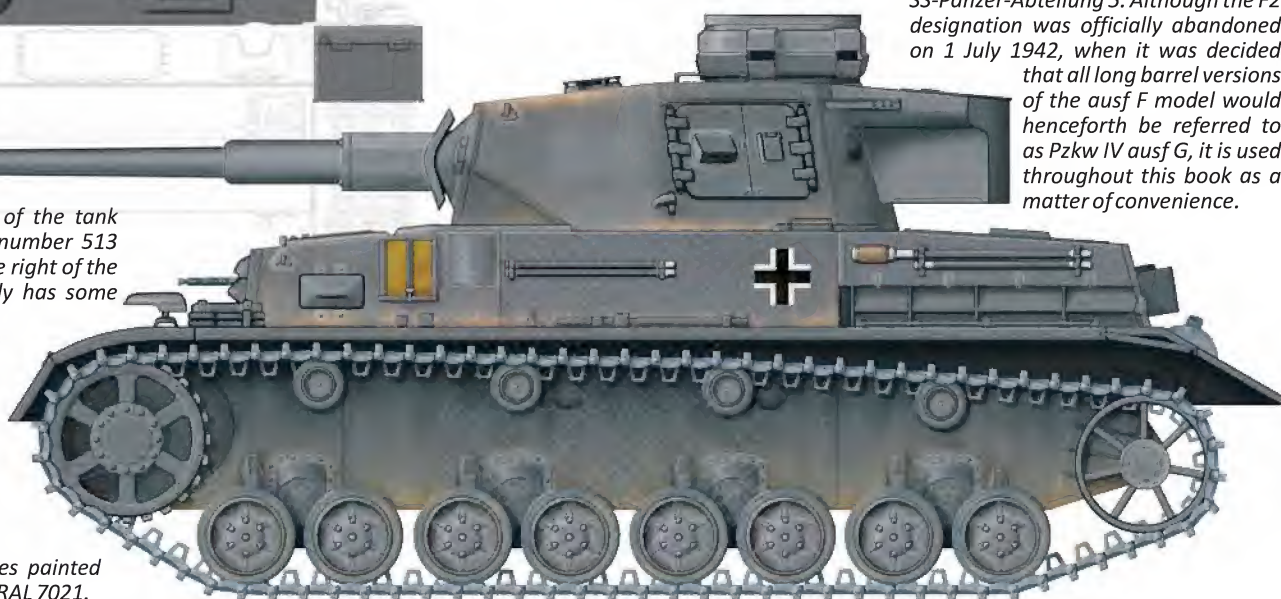
This figure shows the general appearance of the Waffen-SS infantryman in the 1942 Russian summer campaign. His uniform and equipment have altered little since 1940 and only minor changes have taken place. He wears the M35 steel helmet with the SS reversible camouflage helmet cover in the so-called Platanenmuster or Plane Tree pattern - a further example of which can be seen being worn by the NCO in our photograph. His field uniform consists of the SS brown tricot, collared field shirt worn under the M40 field blouse with its characteristic Feldgrau collar and attached SS insignia. Over this field blouse he wears the SS M40 reversible camouflage smock also printed in the Plane Tree pattern. From 1941 photographic evidence shows it was common practice for Waffen-SS soldiers wearing this loose fitting smock to tuck the narrow skirt under its elasticised hip band to give it a smarter appearance. The service trouser issued to the Waffen-SS was the SS field-grey M37 straight leg trouser - similar in design to the Heer service trouser - tucked into the standard issue M39 short shaft leather marching boots. This infantryman has been issued the usual rifleman's equipment and weapons including the SS enlisted mans leather belt, M1939 infantry leather support straps, two rifle ammunition pouches, a small entrenching tool, and S84/98 bayonet with leather frog. Out of view he would have also been issued the M1931 bread bag, M1931 field flask with drinking cup, M1931 mess kit and M1931 SS (Zeltbahn) shelter quarter and gasmask in its M1938 metal canister. His weapons comprise an M1924 stick grenade tucked into his belt and the standard Karabiner 98K rifle slung over his shoulder. He carries an M34 MG ammunition can. Below: The cuff title worn by men of the Westland regiment and the SS collar tab for enlisted personnel. Although the former is a later, woven example in black and light grey, it retains the Latin style of lettering used with the earlier, embroidered versions. The cuff titles of officers were usually embroidered - often by hand - in silver wire.



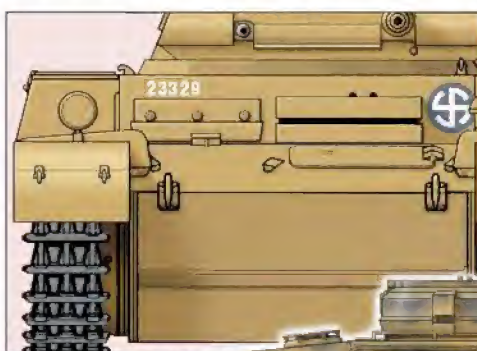
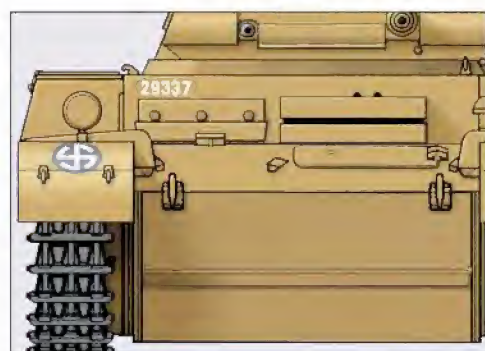


Above: A front view of the tank shown at right. The number 513 on the hull front to the right of the driver's visor probably has some connection to the vehicle's chassis or Fahrgestell number as none of the Waffen-SS tank battalions in training at this time contained a fifth company. What is shown clearly is that the battalion's tanks left the factories painted overall in Dunkelgrau RAL 7021.

Below: Pzkw IV ausf F2. Truppenübungsplatz Wildflecken, Germany. Spring 1942. Photographed with its Waffen-SS crew, some of who were highly decorated, this tank is almost certainly one of the vehicles which would eventually be allocated to 3.Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Abteilung 5. Although the F2 designation was officially abandoned on 1 July 1942, when it was decided that all long barrel versions of the ausf F model would henceforth be referred to as Pzkw IV ausf G, it is used throughout this book as a matter of convenience.



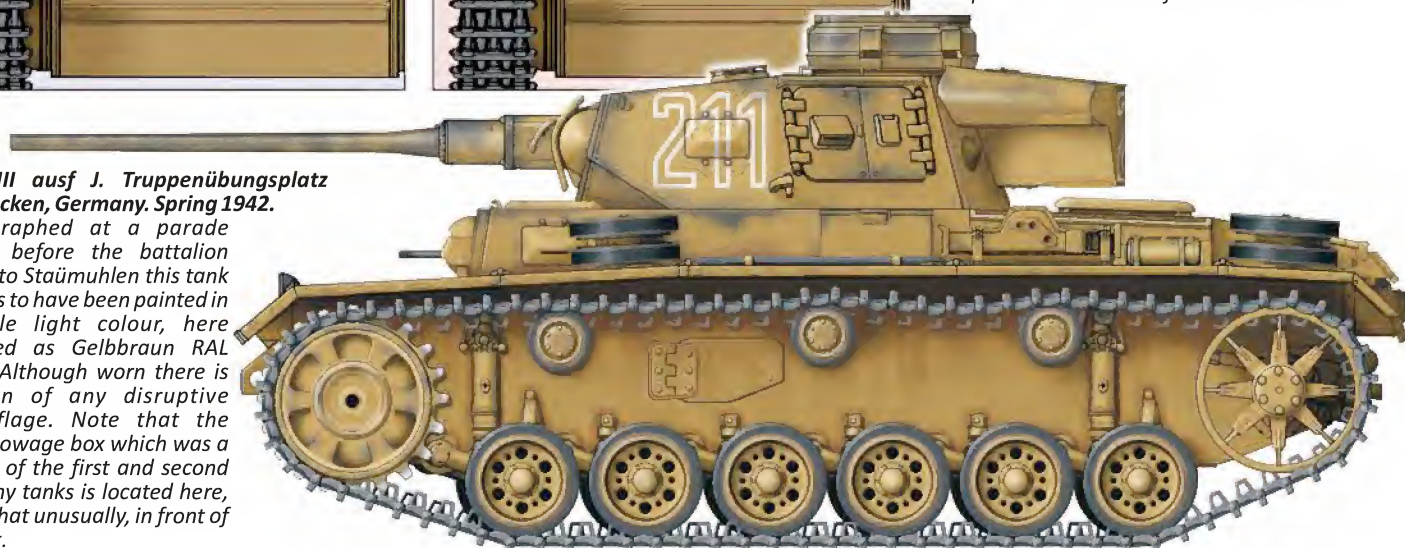
At left: Pzkw IV ausf A. Truppenübungsplatz Wildflecken, Germany. Spring 1942. Photographed in company with the Pzkw IV depicted above, and another elderly ausf A model, this tank is almost certainly a training school vehicle although the battalion did have a number of short barreled Pzkw IV ausf F on hand.



At left: The division's unit insignia here applied to Pzkw II light tanks of SS-Panzer-Abteilung 5. In his account Ewald Klapdor, who served as a platoon commander with the battalion at this time, states clearly that the Sonnenrad, or sun wheel, was added before the tanks left Germany. Note that although the placement differs both are identical in style and size. The vehicle at far left was numbered 104 while the other was numbered 103 indicating that both were attached to the battalion headquarters. The battalion's third, medium, company also operated at least two of these tanks in Russia.

Pzkw III ausf J. Truppenübungsplatz Wildflecken, Germany. Spring 1942.

Photographed at a parade shortly before the battalion moved to Staßfurt this tank appears to have been painted in a single light colour, here rendered as Gelbbraun RAL 8000. Although worn there is no sign of any disruptive camouflage. Note that the large stowage box which was a feature of the first and second company tanks is located here, somewhat unusually, in front of the jack.





Below: Panzerbefehlswagen III ausf H. Stab, SS-Panzer-Abteilung 5. Although the official establishment of a Panzer-Abteilung headquarters called for three of these command tanks, as set out in KStN 1150 of 1 November 1941, The battalion had just one example on hand during the battles in southern Russia and the Caucasus. The distinctive frame radio aerial fitted to the rear hull made these tanks an obvious target and it was replaced by the less prominent Sternantenne from 1943. Note the non-standard rack used to hold fuel cans and the stowage box welded to the right side track guard in front of the air intake. At left: The commander of SS-Panzer-Abteilung 5 in 1942, Johannes-Rudolf Mühlenkamp, photographed after his promotion to Obersturmbannführer and the award of the Ritterkreuz.



At left: We are fortunate that this tank was photographed from several different angles during the summer campaign and this view clearly shows the large box fixed to the track guard on the right hand side. The photograph on which this illustration is based was said to have been taken near Maykop and if correct would date this image to around the second week of August. The extensive foliage camouflage is unusual for German tanks at this stage of the war but was also carried by the other tank in the photograph.

Below: Sdkfz 251 ausf C. SS-Division (mot) Wiking. Russia, summer 1942. Although we have been unable to find any mention of the division receiving any half tracks before November 1942 the photograph on which this illustration is based was clearly taken in the summer months in the rolling grasslands characteristic of the southern Ukraine. The Sonnenrad unit insignia and Balkenkreuz are clearly visible in the photograph on which this illustration is based and the former is rendered in the style commonly used during the summer of 1942. The presence of Sturmabannführer Mühlenkamp, the Panzer battalion commander, and a number of Panzer III ausf J tanks would seem to suggest that this vehicle belonged to either SS-Panzer-Abteilung 5 or perhaps the first battalion of SS-Infanterie-Regiment Germania. The non-standard radio aerial fixed to the front mudguard at least confirms that this half track was used by a headquarters unit. The registration number is completely fictitious and is based on an example seen on a similar half track used by this division in 1944, although it is correct in style and placement.

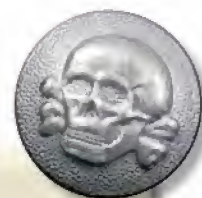
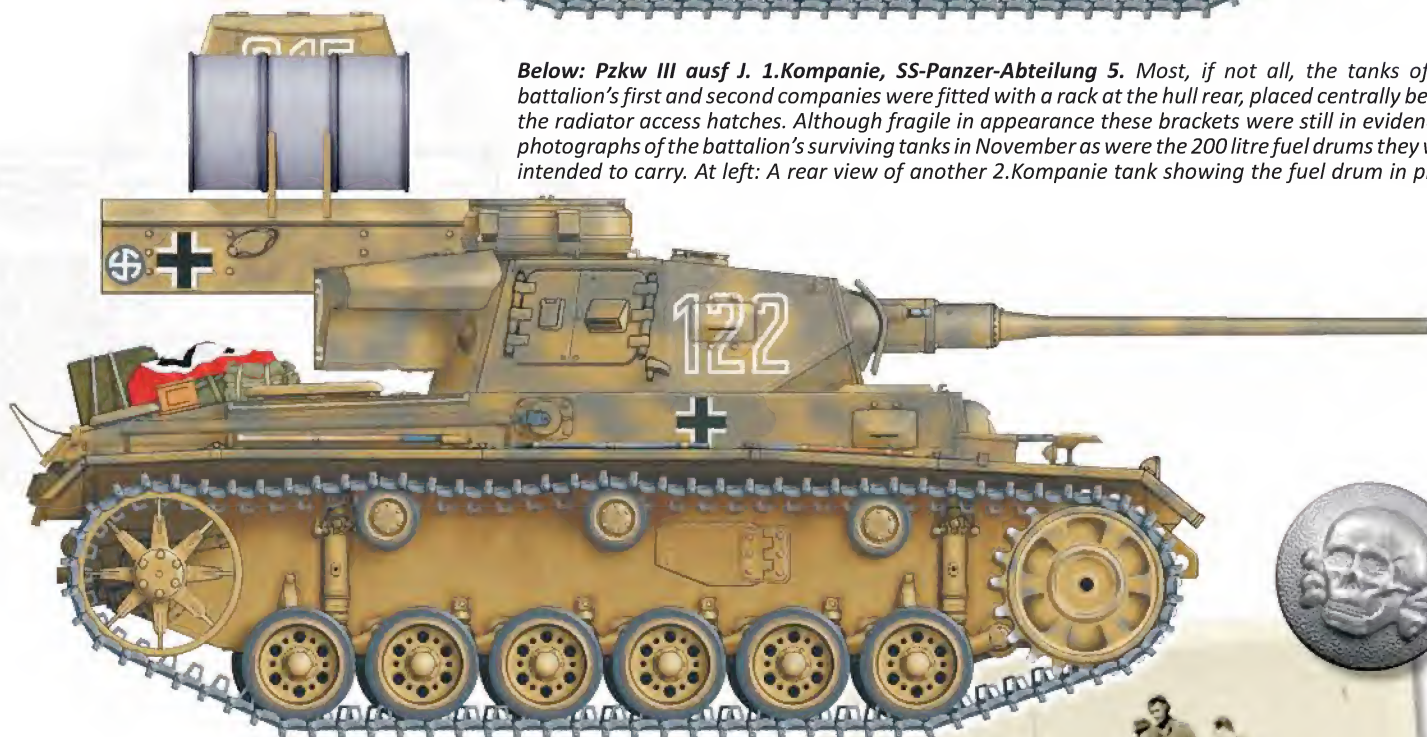


At right: Pzkw III ausf J. 1.Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Abteilung 5. Commanded by the Zugführer of the company's first platoon, this tank was photographed just prior to the assault on the city of Rostov-on-Don.

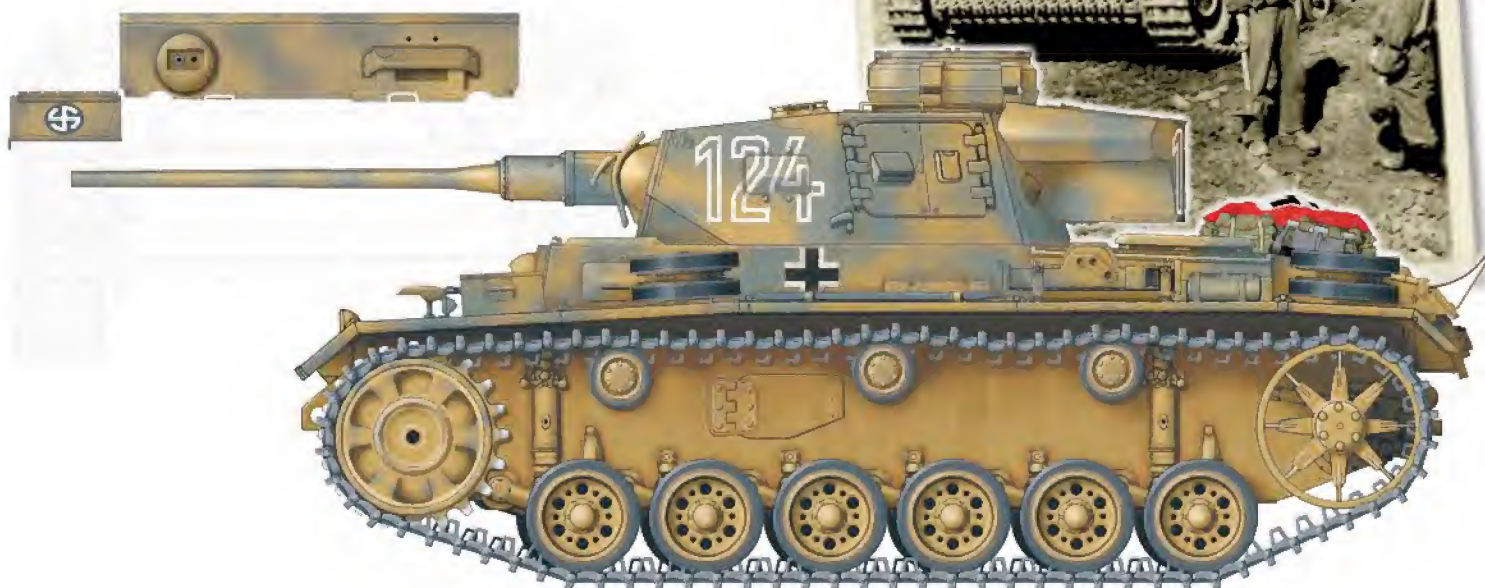
This tank must have either been destroyed or disabled at some time prior to 26 September as command of the platoon had passed to Untersturmführer Kolodziej by that date who retained his tank, number 112, which is depicted on page 15.



Below: Pzkw III ausf J. 1.Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Abteilung 5. Most, if not all, the tanks of the battalion's first and second companies were fitted with a rack at the hull rear, placed centrally behind the radiator access hatches. Although fragile in appearance these brackets were still in evidence in photographs of the battalion's surviving tanks in November as were the 200 litre fuel drums they were intended to carry. At left: A rear view of another 2.Kompanie tank showing the fuel drum in place.



Below and right: Pzkw III ausf J. 1.Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Abteilung 5. Commanded by Scharführer Hühnerfaut this tank was photographed crossing one of the anti-tank ditches outside Rostov in late July 1942. As with all the Pzkw III tanks of SS-Panzer-Abteilung 5 depicted in our illustrations this vehicle has been painted in a base coat of Gelbbraun RAL 8000 over which a disruptive pattern in Graugrün RAL 7008 has been sprayed, the latter in varying degrees of intensity. The large white, outline turret numbers were used by all the battalion's tanks that arrived in Russia in mid-June including the four Pzkw IV ausf F tanks of 3.Kompanie as can be seen in our illustration and photograph shown on page 21.



At right: Pzkw III ausf J. 1. Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Abteilung 5. This vehicle was commanded by Untersturmführer Max Kolodziey who was killed when his tank received a direct hit during the assault on the anti-tank ditch at Sagopschi on 26 September 1942. By this date Kolodziey had been placed in command of the company's first

platoon but retained his original tank with the number shown here. Our illustration shows the large 200 litre fuel drum in place on the rear hull. These containers left the factories in a colour referred to as Zinc and although it is possible - even likely in this case - that they were repainted in the field, the examples in this book are all shown in their original shade.



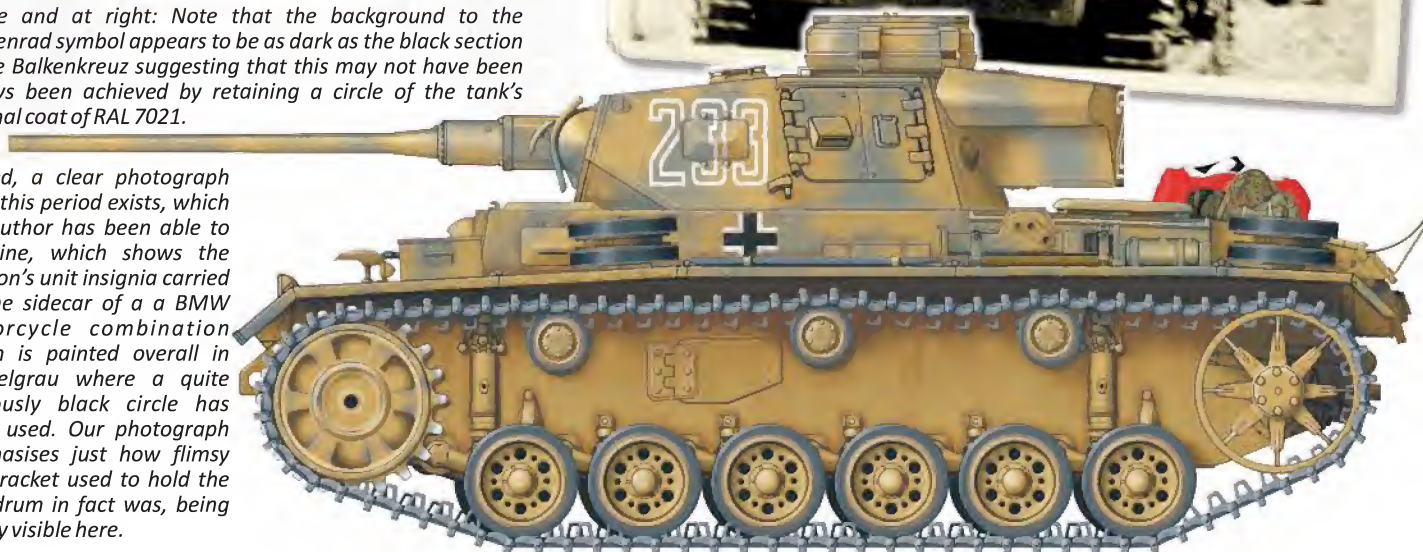
At left: Pzkw III ausf J. 2. Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Abteilung 5. As with a number of the battalion's tanks this vehicle was photographed at different times from several angles enabling us to create a very faithful rendition. Of note is the black spade symbol on the hull side just in front of the

vision port carried by many - but not all - the tanks of 2. Kompanie. It is possible that a system based on playing cards was used throughout the battalion given the use of a red heart motif by the Pzkw IV tanks of 3. Kompanie in at least two confirmed cases. Of course it is possible, that these markings were only used in the instances that can be verified by photographic evidence considering that they are quite obviously absent in as many images as they are present.



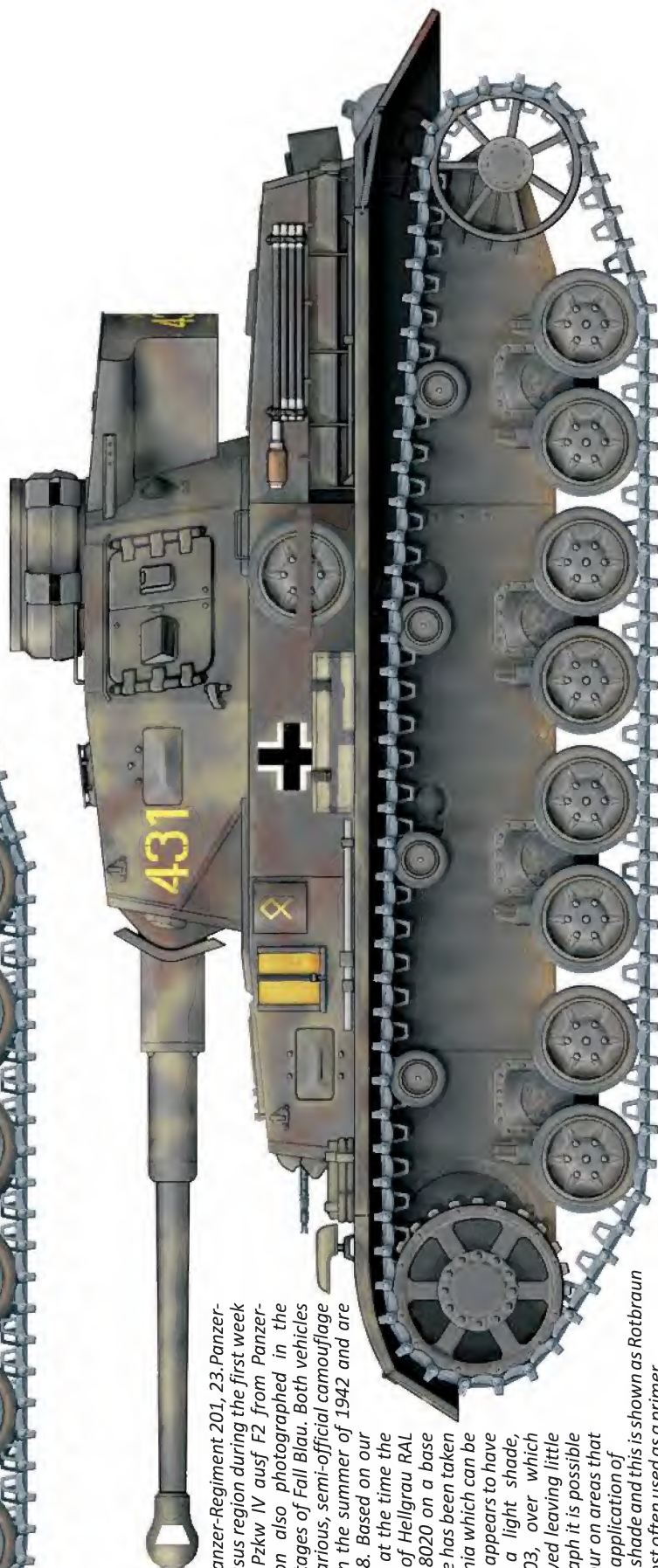
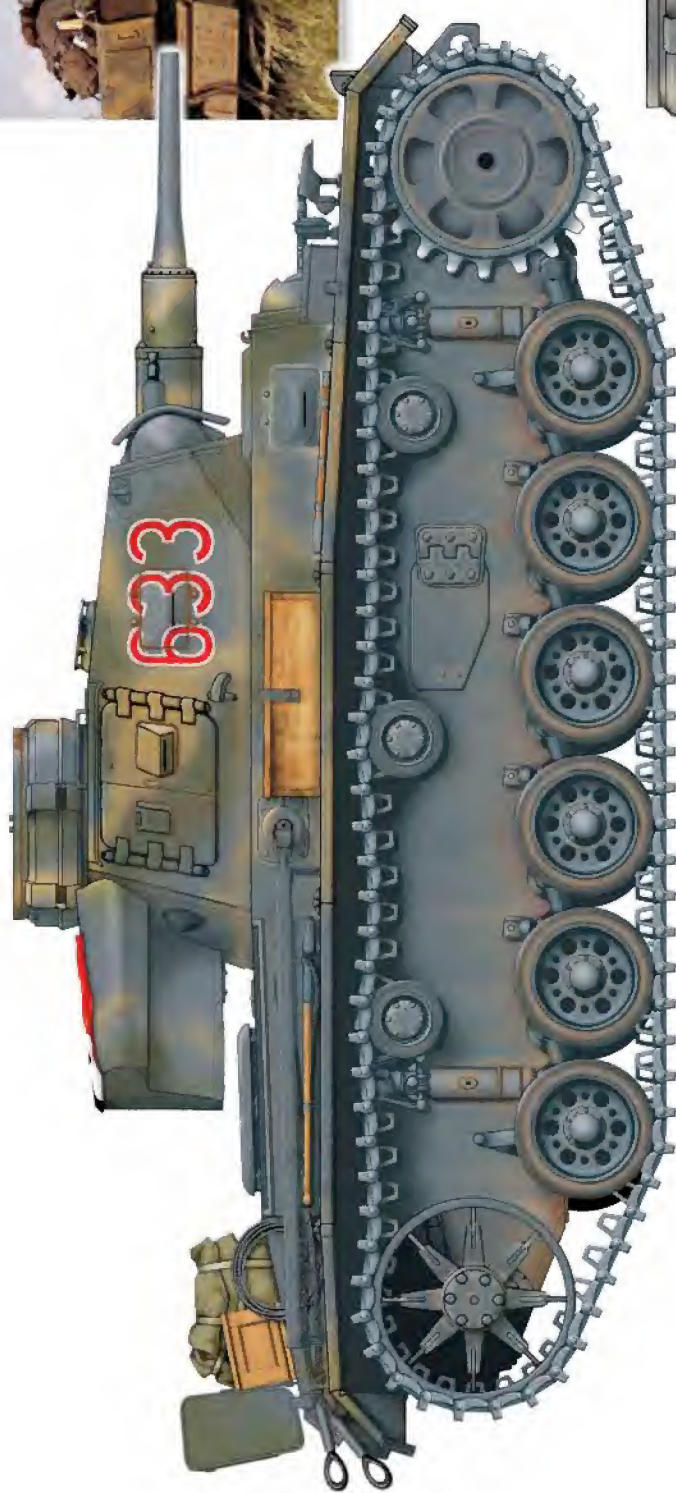
Above and at right: Note that the background to the Sonnenrad symbol appears to be as dark as the black section of the Balkenkreuz suggesting that this may not have been always been achieved by retaining a circle of the tank's original coat of RAL 7021.

Indeed, a clear photograph from this period exists, which the author has been able to examine, which shows the division's unit insignia carried on the sidecar of a BMW motorcycle combination which is painted overall in Dunkelgrau where a quite obviously black circle has been used. Our photograph emphasises just how flimsy the bracket used to hold the fuel drum in fact was, being barely visible here.

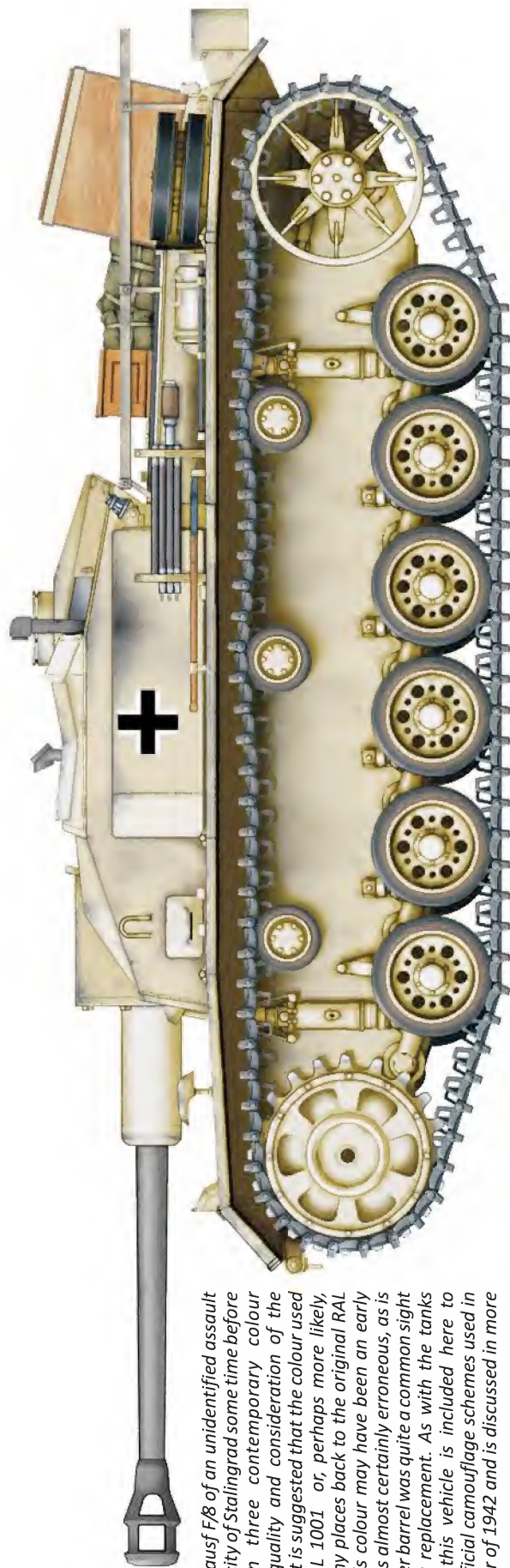




Although this section is primarily concerned with the use of paint as a means of camouflage one technical aspect deserves mention. Most tanks of this regiment seem to have been fitted with a distinctively shaped stowage canister at the hull rear. The available images would suggest that they were all similar to that shown in our photograph with handles at each end and a small access hatch, hinged at the top with a lock along the bottom edge. We have been unable to ascertain their origin although it has been suggested that there may be some connection to the Luftwaffe



Above is shown a Pzkw III ausf J of Panzer-Regiment 201, 23. Panzer-Division photographed in the Caucasus region during the first week of August 1942 and at right is a Pzkw IV ausf F2 from Panzer-Regiment 36 of 14. Panzer-Division also photographed in the Caucasus region during the early stages of Fall Blau. Both vehicles are included here to illustrate the various, semi-official camouflage schemes used in southern Russia in the summer of 1942 and are dealt with in more detail on page 8. Based on our knowledge of the colours available at the time the Pzkw III is depicted here with lines of Hellgrau RAL 7009 overpainted with Braun RAL 8020 on a base colour of Dunkelgrau RAL 7021. Care has been taken not to cover the division's unit insignia which can be seen on the rear fender. The Pzkw IV appears to have been initially painted overall in a light shade, rendered here as Grau RAL 7003, over which Dunkelgrau has been liberally sprayed leaving little of the lighter colour. In our photograph it is possible to see the residue of the lighter colour on areas that would have been masked during the application of 7021. There is evidence of a dark red shade and this is shown as Rotbraun RAL 8012, a deep, rich red-brown most often used as a primer.



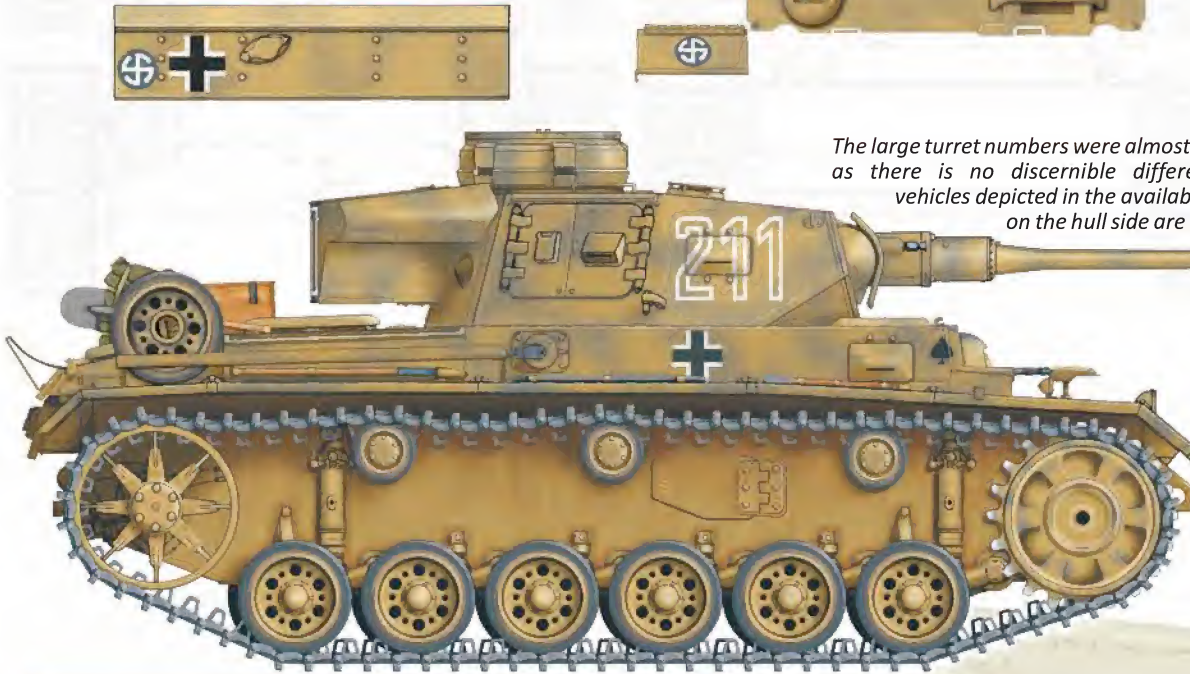
At right is a Sturmgeschütz III ausf F/8 of an unidentified assault gun unit photographed in the city of Stalingrad some time before December 1942. Based on three contemporary colour photographs of reasonable quality and consideration of the colours available at the time, it is suggested that the colour used here was either Elfenbein RAL 1001 or, perhaps more likely, Beige RAL 1002 - worn in many places back to the original RAL 7021. The suggestion that this colour may have been an early issue of Dunkelgelb RAL 7028 is almost certainly erroneous, as is explained in the text. The darker barrel was quite a common sight and may have been a recent replacement. As with the tanks shown on the facing page, this vehicle is included here to illustrate the various, semi-official camouflage schemes used in southern Russia in the summer of 1942 and is discussed in more detail on page 8.



The two Pzkw IV ausf F tanks of Panzer-Regiment 31 from 5. Panzer-Division, also photographed in Russia in 1942, have adopted a more orthodox approach. Tanks of this regiment retained their original RAL 7021 base colour broken up with small, irregular shapes of RAL 7008 - or a similar darker shade - applied in a variety of ways. Although the need for some kind of disruptive camouflage has been accepted it was apparently thought important to retain the regiment's colourful unit insignia of a devil's head.



Below: Pzkw III ausf J. 2.Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Abteilung 5. Once again we are fortunate to have a subject that was photographed from several different angles within a relatively short space of time allowing us to create a comprehensive rendering. This tank carries a full range of markings including the division's Sonnenrad symbol in white on a darker background and a large white turret number which identifies the company, the platoon and the tank's place within the platoon reading from left to right. In his account Ewald Klapdor is quite emphatic that the unit insignia and numbers were applied before the battalion left Germany.



The large turret numbers were almost certainly applied using a stencil as there is no discernible difference in shape between the vehicles depicted in the available images. Further the numbers on the hull side are identical to those applied to the

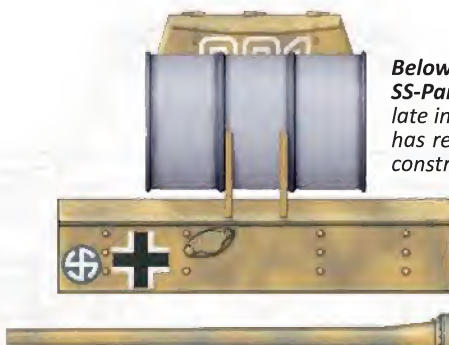
rear of the stowage box. Similarly there is no difference between the unit insignia applied to the hull rear and the front mudguard. The black spade marking was carried by many of the vehicles of 2.Kompanie although photographic evidence shows that it was not used by all the company's tanks. This vehicle is also depicted in the photograph below.



Above: The Sonnenrad, or Sun Wheel, insignia adopted by the Wiking division and the spade symbol used by some crews of 2.Kompanie. Although it is likely that in most cases the dark background was RAL 7021 Dunkelgrau - a circle of the tank's original colour simply left unpainted - there is some evidence that in a number of cases it may have been black.



Below and left: Pzkw III ausf J. 2.Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Abteilung 5. Photographed very late in the campaign this tank nevertheless has retained its fuel drum on the specially constructed bracket at the hull rear.

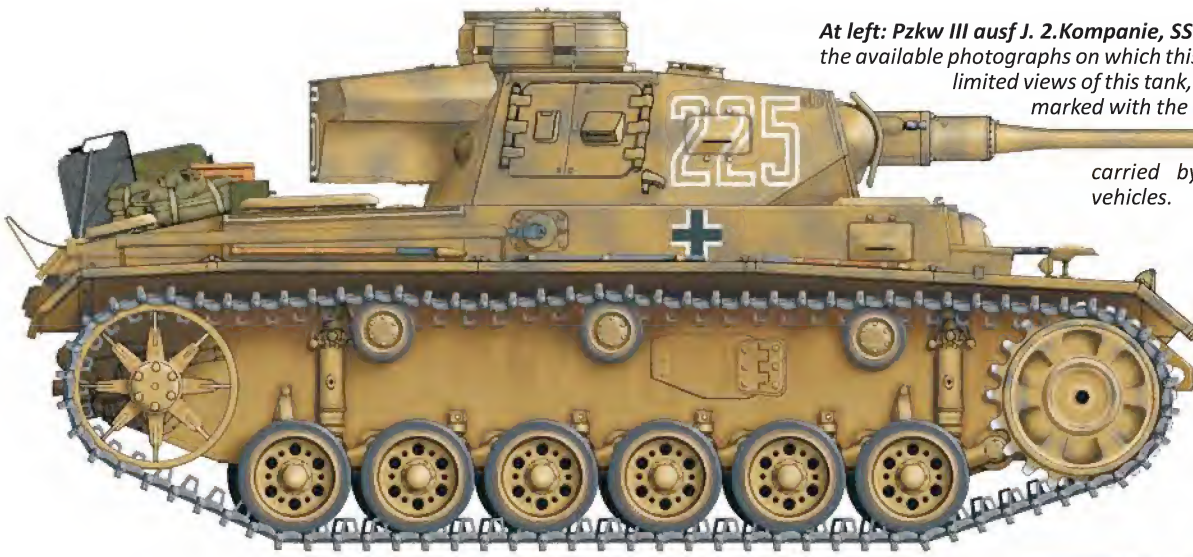


Although these drums were essentially the same in design the notations embossed in the top varied and that shown in our photograph reads *Kraftstoff-200L-Feuergefährlich-Wehrmacht-* all in capital letters. In addition to the tool box situated on the track guard in front of the jack, the tanks of both companies were fitted with a non-standard stowage box just to the rear of the Notek light.

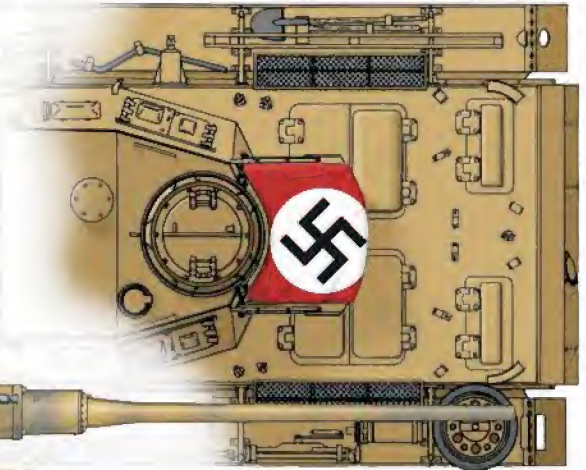


At left: Pzkw III ausf J. 2.Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Abteilung 5. Although the available photographs on which this illustration is based show only limited views of this tank, it is possible to see that it is not marked with the distinctive black spade insignia

carried by many of the 2.Kompanie vehicles.



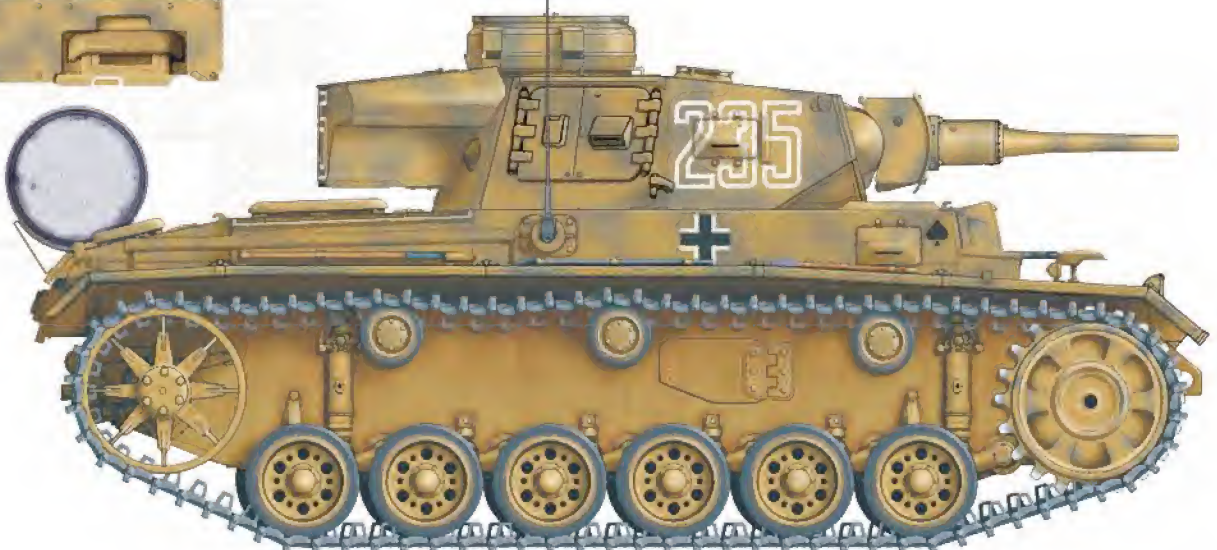
Below and right: Pzkw III ausf J. 2.Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Abteilung 5. Commanded by Untersturmführer Karl Nicolussi-Leck this tank was knocked out in the attack on Malgobek on Tuesday, 29 September 1942, although the crew managed to escape unharmd. In common with many - but apparently not all - the tanks of this company the vehicle shown here carries the distinctive black spade marking on the hull side towards the front. This tank was photographed in company with the Befehlspanzerwagen depicted on page 13 and was also heavily camouflaged with local foliage. The use of the national flag as an aerial recognition device was common at this stage of the war.

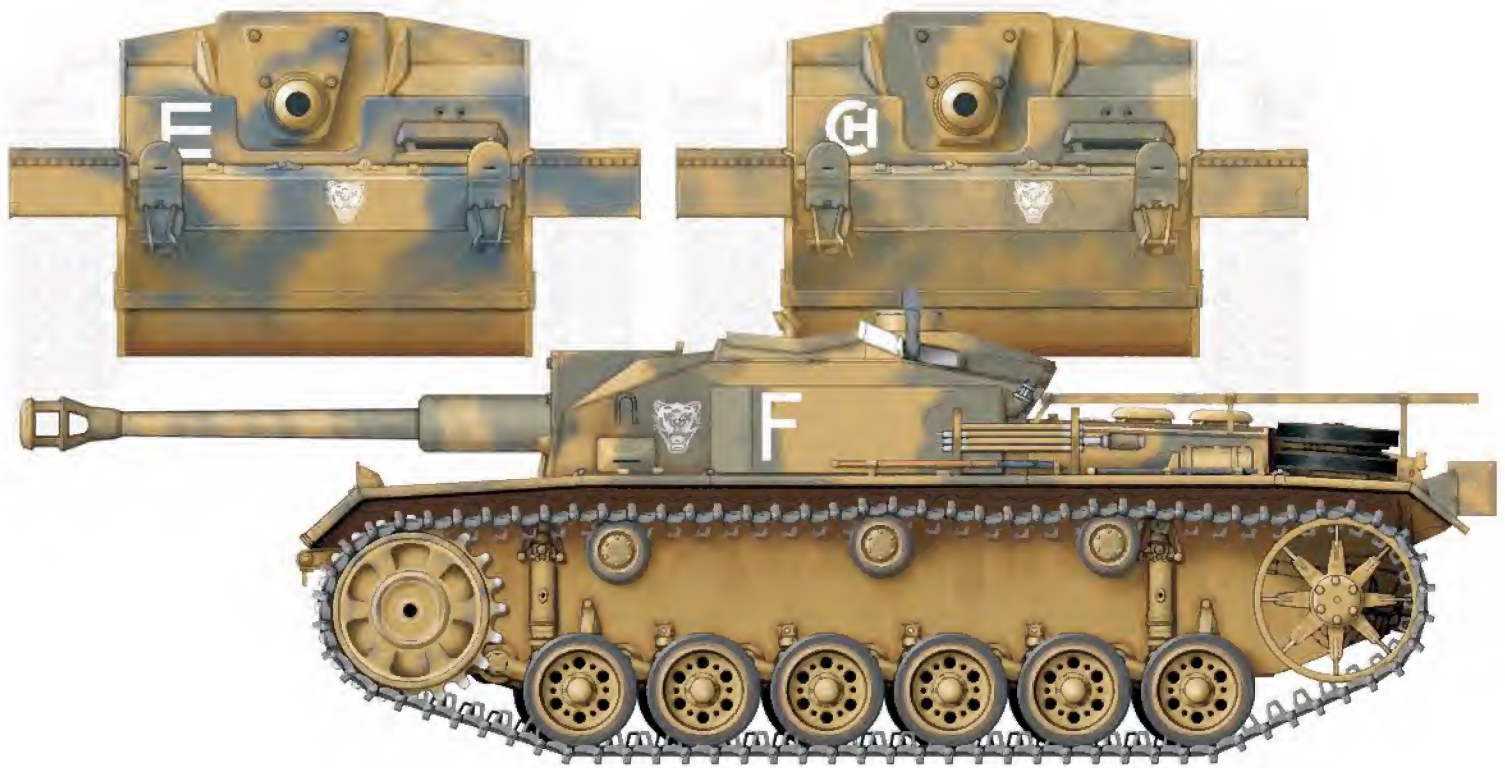


Below: Pzkw III ausf J. 2.Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Abteilung 5. This tank is one of perhaps twelve armed with the short L/42 gun which were on hand when the battalion arrived in Russia indicating that it was assembled prior to December 1941 when the longer L/60 gun was introduced. It also features the Vorpanzer additional armour on the gun mantlet and hull front which was constructed from 20mm thick plates and incorporated into production on the later Pzkw III ausf L and issued as a kit which could be fitted to older models by unit workshops.

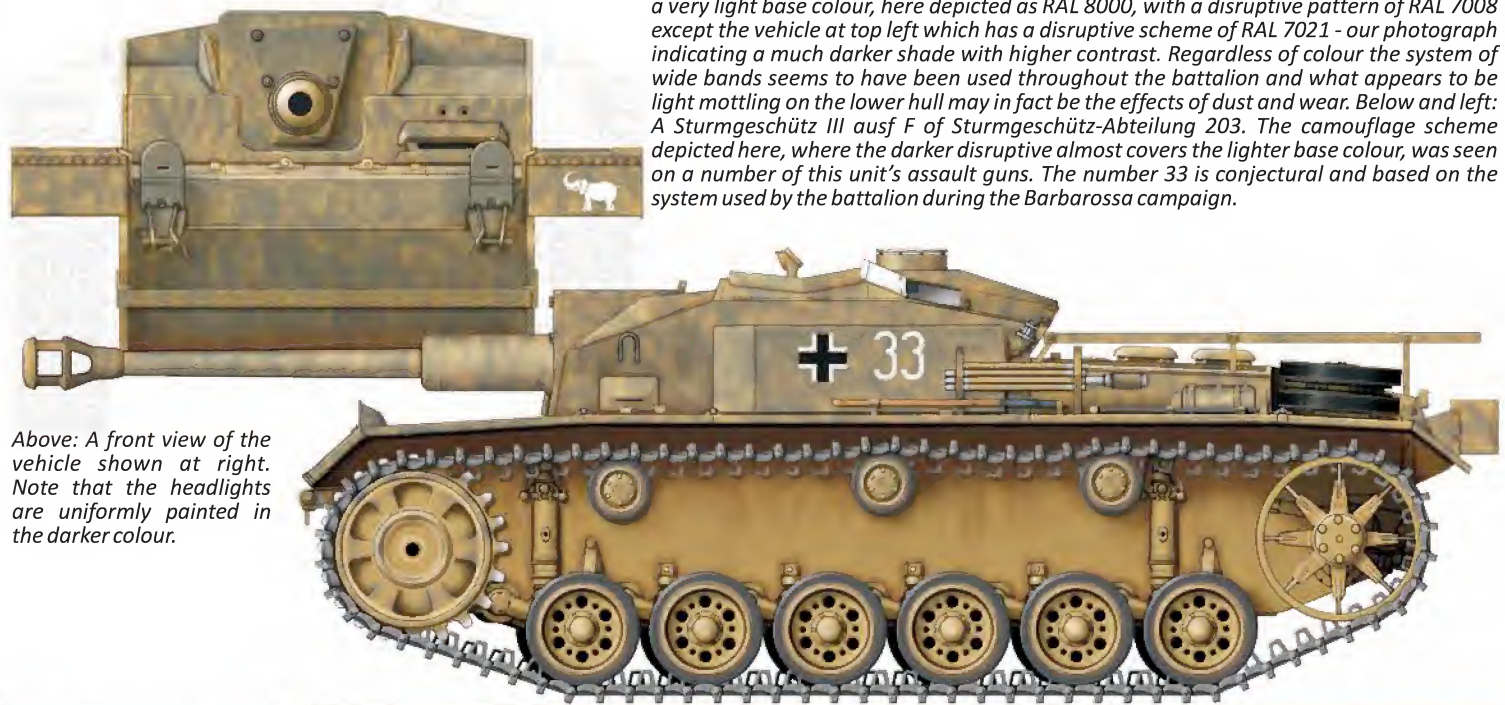


Above: A front view of the tank shown at right. Note that the division's unit insignia is partly obscured by the disruptive camouflage. In his history of the battalion Ewald Klapdor clearly states that both the Sonnenrad symbol and the turret number of each tank was added at some time before the battalion left the Staumühlen training facility in Germany which suggests that the camouflage may have been added after the tanks arrived in Russia.

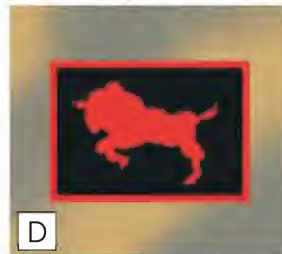
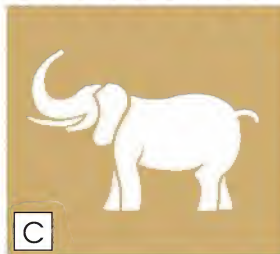




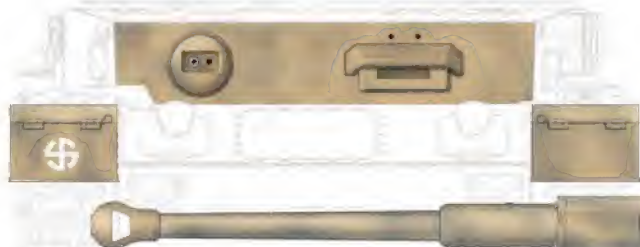
Above: Sturmgeschütz III ausf F assault guns of Sturmgeschütz-Abteilung 210 all photographed during the Caucasus campaign. The significance of the large white letters is not clear but they may have identified a platoon within a Battery. All three were painted in a very light base colour, here depicted as RAL 8000, with a disruptive pattern of RAL 7008 except the vehicle at top left which has a disruptive scheme of RAL 7021 - our photograph indicating a much darker shade with higher contrast. Regardless of colour the system of wide bands seems to have been used throughout the battalion and what appears to be light mottling on the lower hull may in fact be the effects of dust and wear. Below and left: A Sturmgeschütz III ausf F of Sturmgeschütz-Abteilung 203. The camouflage scheme depicted here, where the darker disruptive almost covers the lighter base colour, was seen on a number of this unit's assault guns. The number 33 is conjectural and based on the system used by the battalion during the Barbarossa campaign.



Above: A front view of the vehicle shown at right. Note that the headlights are uniformly painted in the darker colour.



Above: The unit insignia shown above all relate to assault gun battalions or batteries that served in the Caucasus campaign of 1942. A) Sturmgeschütz-Abteilung 210. In July 1942 this battalion was attached to IV.Armeekorps of 1.Panzerarmee. The unit was completely equipped with assault guns armed with the long barrel L/43 gun; B) Sturmgeschütz-Abteilung 210. A number of accounts suggest that this sign was adopted by the battalion at some time after the 1942 battles however a very clear photograph taken during the fighting to capture the town of Novorossiysk on the Black Sea coast shows that some vehicles at least carried it at a much earlier date. It may in fact have been a variation on the system of letters used to differentiate sub-units within the battalion; C) Sturmgeschütz-Abteilung 203. In July 1942 this battalion was attached to III.Panzerkorps of 1.Panzerarmee. Slight variations in the shape of this symbol are known and it may have also been applied in yellow, the colours perhaps identifying individual batteries; D) Sturmgeschütz-Abteilung 191. The varying shades visible in a number of monochrome photographs suggest that the batteries of this battalion may have used different colours in place of the red shown here; E) Sturmgeschütz-Batterie 287. Formed in August 1942 by renaming Sturmgeschütz-Batterie 659, this unit had originally been equipped for service in North Africa with Sonderverband 287. The battery was however transferred to 1.Panzerarmee and fought in Russia from 14 October until 20 December when it returned to Germany from where it was subsequently dispatched to Tunisia.



When the battalion left Germany in mid-July 1942 the Pzkw IV ausf F2 tanks of the third company had not completed their training as these versions with the long barrel L/43 gun were received much later than the Pzkw IV ausf F models which were sent to Russia with the battalion staff and the tanks of the first and second companies. This may account for the difference in the style and colour of the markings, specifically the much smaller, solid turret numbers which are displayed on a light coloured rectangle and the lack of a dark background to the Sonnenrad unit insignia.

At right: Pzkw IV ausf F2. 3.Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Regiment 5.

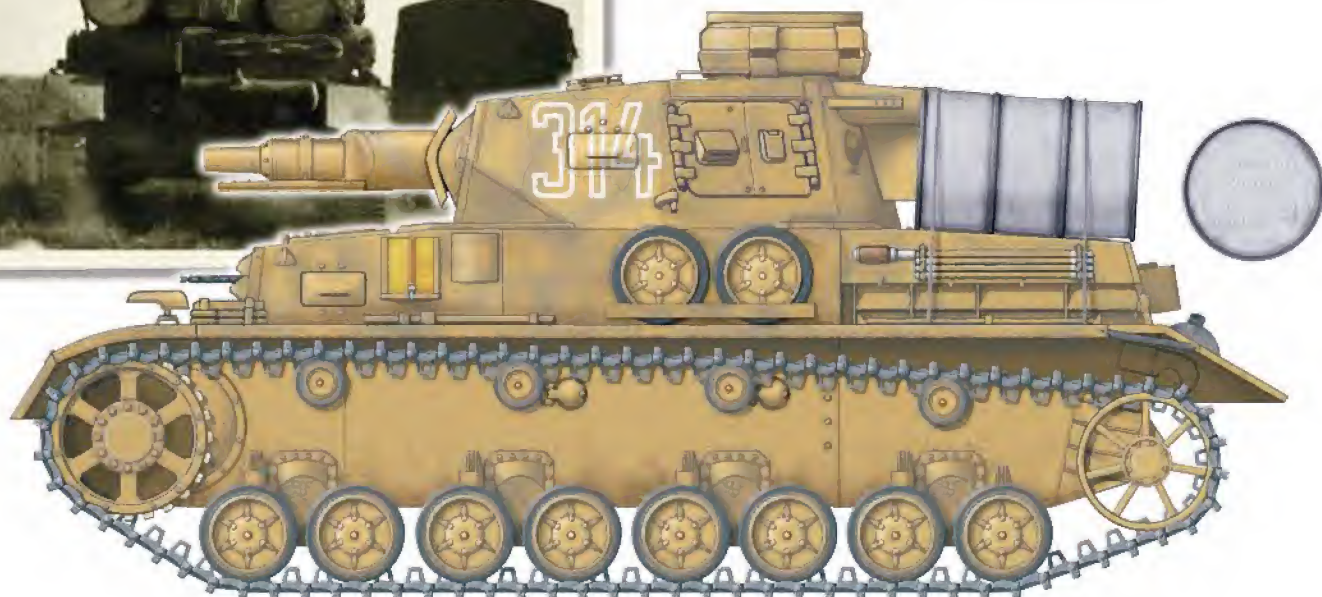
This tank, commanded by Untersturmführer Fritz Dedelow, Zugführer of the company's first platoon, appears very similar to that shown above, however the turret numbers are significantly larger and this vehicle carries a heart shaped symbol on the hull side which is clearly visible in the original photograph.

Below: Pzkw IV ausf F2. 3.Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Regiment 5. We have assumed that an earlier base colour of RAL 8000 has been covered with RAL 8020 and RAL 7027 - both of which would have been available from late March - with the exception of the area around the turret number which has been left in the original colour. A detailed explanation of the colours available during this period and their possible use is given on page 8. This tank was commanded by the 3.Kompanie Chef, Obersturmführer Fritz Darges.

The rendering of the camouflage colours here as Braun RAL 8020 and Grau RAL 7027, based as it is on monochrome photographs, is of course speculative. It does however offer an explanation for the obviously light background of the turret numbers which can be clearly seen in the available photographs.



Below: Pzkw IV ausf F. 3.Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Regiment 5. As mentioned earlier the short barrel versions of the Pzkw IV of 3.Kompanie left Germany with the greater part of the battalion in mid-July as these crews had completed their training. Note that the style of marking is identical to the tanks of the battalion staff and the Pzkw III companies including the dark background of the division's unit insignia which is clearly visible in the photograph at left. Although there were probably four of these tanks on hand we have only been able to identify this single example.



SS-Unterscharführer, SS-Infanterie-Regiment Germania, SS-Division (mot) Wiking. Summer 1942.

In the spring of 1942 new camouflage uniform items were introduced to Waffen-SS units including the lightweight camouflage field cap shown here which soon became popular with all ranks. Other, unofficial lightweight camouflage items were also manufactured and were prevalent amongst NCO's and officers of the Wiking division. These included field manufactured shirts and tunics made from old camouflage smocks or Zeltbahn tent quarters. As was usual with field tailored items various designs were encountered, the style largely depending on the individual's specifications.

In addition, some NCO's and officers made adaptations to their standard SS camouflage smocks - for example adding either chest pockets or a zipper front. This NCO wears the highly popular reversible camouflage field cap with the spring - predominantly green - Platanenmuster pattern outermost. Newly issued in May 1942 these caps were made of the same waterproof duck cotton used in the manufacture of SS camouflage smocks. As a concession to the warm climate he has removed his woollen SS field blouse and only wears the SS brown tricot, collared shirt under a field made camouflage shirt. The latter has been fabricated from a recycled Palmenmuster or Palm Tree pattern camouflage smock and has a five button front and two chest pockets. Unlike the smocks, these field made shirts and tunics were not reversible and there was a tendency to add rank insignia and awards, depending of course on the individual. In our illustration the NCO has added SS rank shoulder straps and pinned to his left chest pocket is the Infanterie-Sturmabzeichen or infantry assault badge, this version in bronze for mechanised infantry. The service trousers are the SS field grey M37 straight leg trouser tucked into M39 short shaft leather marching boots. As is usual for a squad leader he carries the MP40 and is issued with 6x30 field binoculars and the M1935 map case. His personal equipment consists of the M1939 leather infantry support straps, SS enlisted mans belt, a single, first type MP40 canvas magazine pouch, a captured Russian T33 pistol and its holster. Other equipment items carried, but hidden from view here, would be the M1931 bread bag, M1931 field flask and mess kit M1931. Below: The camouflage smock worn by the officer nearest the camera - also in the Palmenmuster pattern - has been altered with the addition of a zipper front. Also shown is the bronze infantry assault badge.



Pzkw III ausf J tanks of 2.Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Abteilung 5 photographed advancing through the rolling grasslands of the northern Caucasus in late July or early August 1942. Just visible on the hull side of the tank depicted below is the black spade marking which many of the tanks of this company carried. Most, if not all, tanks were painted in a camouflage scheme of a light base colour covered to varying degrees with a darker shade sprayed in mottled, random shapes. On some vehicles this darker colour is quite obvious while on others it is far more subtle and can be easily missed in black and white photographs. We have no way of ascertaining what colours were used with any certainty however our research and conclusions regarding the camouflage used by this division and other units in southern Russia during 1942 is presented in some detail on page 8. The dark background to the division's Sonnenrad unit insignia is most probably Dunkelgrau RAL 7021 - the colour in which this vehicle was painted when it left the assembly plant - although black cannot be discounted as evidenced by comparison with the Balkenkreuz clearly visible here.



Standing in the turret of his Befehlspanzerwagen III ausf H, Sturmbannführer Johannes-Rudolf Mühlenkamp is shown here conferring with Sturmbannführer August Dieckmann, the commander of the first battalion of SS-Infanterie-Regiment Germania. The division's Panzer battalion had just one of these command tanks on hand during the fighting in the Caucasus and there is strong evidence that it was destroyed, or at least disabled, during the fighting for the towns of Malgobek and Sagopshi in late September 1942. The photograph below was taken from the same sequence and shows Sturmbannführer Dieckmann accompanied by Obersturmführer Helmut Pförtner who commanded one of the companies of Dieckmann's battalion. Just 29 years old when this photograph was taken Pförtner was awarded the Ritterkreuz for his bravery during an action of 18 January 1942. Both are wearing what appear to be non-regulation lightweight caps based on the design of the Bergmütze worn by mountain units.



This image depicts the same scene shown in the photograph at the top of the preceding page and together they present a good view of many of the features of these command tanks - this example based on a Pzkw III ausf H model. Of note is the 30mm additional armour at the hull front with the blanked-off machine gun aperture, the port side radio aerial - just behind Dieckmann - and its protective wooden trough, on which the Sturmabführer is standing, fixed to the top of the track guard. Just behind the front mudguard is the distinctively shaped Notek light and, to its left, a hull width indicator light. We can however offer no explanation as to the purpose of the large metal disc behind the lights. In the original photograph it is possible to discern the numbers 14.3.42 painted in white on the forward surface of the disc. Also of note is the non-standard rack on the hull rear used to hold fuel canisters. This vehicle is also shown in the illustration section on page 13.





The photograph on this page shows a Pzkw III ausf J of 2.Kompanie, possibly the second platoon, taken from the same sequence as the image on page 23. Here however can be seen a much more obvious application of a dark camouflage colour over the lighter base which in some areas has been rendered very heavily indeed, to the point of partially covering the unit insignia on the front mudguard. Also of note is the anti-aircraft mount for the MG34 held in place on the commander's cupola by a u-shaped bracket. The turret number of the Pzkw III shown at the top of the facing page, 211, identifies the commander of the second company's first platoon. This vehicle is also marked with the 2.Kompanie black spade symbol accompanied by what may be a name painted in white. Unfortunately we have been unable to decipher the lettering in either of the examples available to us. The non-standard wooden box attached to the port side track guard just behind the lights, visible in both photographs, was a common feature of this battalion's Pzkw III tanks. The vehicle in the photograph at bottom is shown crossing one of the anti-tank ditches outside Rostov. Presumably this vehicle was either disabled or destroyed at some later date as it is known that tank 112 was leading the first platoon of 1.Kompanie at Malgobek in September 1942.





At left: A Pzkw III ausf J tank of 2.Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Abteilung 5. Of note is the black spade marking on the hull side in front of the opened vision port. The marking was common, but not universal, to the tanks of the second company and this example also has a notation in white which unfortunately is illegible. This is in fact the vehicle shown on the previous page with the MG34 now locked in place. Below: A section from one of the division's infantry regiments moving through the terrain that was so typical of the northern Caucasus. Bottom: Two Pzkw III ausf J tanks of 2.Kompanie photographed as they negotiated one of the three tank ditches that formed the defensive line around Rostov. The Russians fought doggedly to hold these positions and the men of the Wiking division found the opposition grew stronger the closer they came to the city. The wooden cheval de frise, which has been modernised by the addition of barbed wire, had been used since medieval times as a defence against cavalry.



Both photographs on this page show Marder II 7.62cm Pak 36(r) self-propelled guns of the Wiking division's SS-Panzerjäger-Abteilung 5 during the advance into the Caucasus. The battalion received twelve of these vehicles in July 1942 and all were allocated to 3.Kompanie commanded by Hauptsturmführer Ernst Herbert Oeck. Soon after the battalion arrived at the front in mid July, until sometime in October, Hauptsturmführer Oeck's company was permanently attached to SS-Panzer-Abteilung 5 and was able to report in September that the twelve original vehicles were still operational - although ten were lost during the winter battles later in the same year. The two survivors remained on strength until June 1943 when they were handed over to 50. Infanterie-Division.





The photographs on this page all show examples of the Wiking division's unit insignia. Above: A Marder II self-propelled gun of SS-Panzerjäger-Abteilung 5. The other vehicles shown in this image are decidedly darker and are probably painted overall in Dunkelgrau RAL 7021 with the Sonnenrad visible on the staff car. Faintly discernible on the rear stowage box of the Marder is a dark letter W. At right: A Zündapp KS750 motorcycle, which may have belonged to the division's headquarters, photographed in the Caucasus. The unit insignia here is extremely worn and determining an exact shade is quite impossible. Below: Two Opel Blitz lorries of the SS-Infanterie-Regiment Germania undergoing regular maintenance. The unit insignia here is also quite worn but may have been rendered in a more subdued colour, possibly yellow, as it is obviously darker than the white of the vehicle number plates.





Both photographs on this page show a captured British Valentine MkIII tank loaded onto an SdAnh 116 trailer. In his account of the summer campaign Ewald Klapdor records that on 28 September 1942, in the fighting for Malgobek and Sagopshi 2.Kompanie of SS-Panzer-Abteilung 5 disabled five of these vehicles, two of which were recovered. These large trailers, introduced in late 1940, were capable of carrying up to 23 tons and were towed by either an Sdkfz 8 or Sdkfz 9 half track. Note the cabin at the rear which contained a second driver and the 1938 Horch 830R Kfz 15 staff car in the background which appears to have been camouflaged in a similar manner to the tanks of the Panzer battalion.

In November 1942, when the Waffen-SS motorised infantry formations were renamed as Panzergrenadier divisions, each was allocated a Panzerwerkstatt-Kompanie organised around KStN 1187 of 1 June 1942 - which itself had been upgraded from the October 1937 document. It seems unlikely however that the tank battalion with which the Wiking division operated during the summer would have merited a complete maintenance company and it is probable that the battalion contained a Panzerwerkstatt-Zug or platoon. Indeed, Klapdor regularly refers to the maintenance unit as a section commanded by an Obersturmführer, the equivalent of an Oberleutnant. The platoon may have had as many as two SdAnh 116 trailers and three of the Sdkfz 9 halftracks shown here on hand.





Above: Pzkw III tanks of 2.Kompanie, with a solitary Pzkw IV of 3.Kompanie in the background, photographed in late 1942. Clearly visible here is the 200 litre oil drum and the bracket used to hold it in place welded to the rear hull - a feature of most, if not all, the battalion's Pzkw III tanks. Note also that the Sonnenrad divisional insignia seen here, and also on other 2.Kompanie vehicles, is quite obviously darker than both the white edges of the Balkenkreuz and the tank's number displayed on the turret stowage box. The officer with the cigar is Obersturmführer Hans Flügel. Although some accounts suggest that Flügel did not take command of 2.Kompanie until sometime in December 1942, no less an authority than Johannes Mühlenkamp states that Flügel was the company commander as early as 25 September during the assault on Malgobek and Sagopshi and he was in all likelihood promoted with the death of Staden in late June.

NOTES

1) True and exact figures for German military casualties for the 1939-45 period are a matter of some controversy as the official OKW records are available only to 31 January 1945, thus omitting numbers from the last battles. In addition each branch had its own system for reporting casualties and it is likely that many reports were prepared but did not reach OKW before the January summary was compiled. A post-war Soviet study managed to produce two conflicting sets of casualty figures concluding that the German's record keeping procedures made any detailed and accurate account impossible. The findings of research carried out in Germany since the fall of the European communist regimes places the figure for killed in action from June to December 1941 at 295,528 and this is indeed very close to the OKW figures compiled during the war.

2) Although the capture of the Caucasus oilfields are specifically mentioned in the directive, more emphasis was given to the destruction of the Red Army suggesting that Fall Blau was a continuation of the Barbarossa operations of 1941. By 1 June however, less than a month before the offensive was scheduled to begin, Hitler was declaring that the war would be lost if he could not capture Maykop and Grozny.

3) The codenames for the operation were changed due to a serious security breach. On 19 June an aircraft carrying a staff officer of 23.Panzer-Division was shot down over the Russian lines and a complete set of plans fell into the hands of the enemy. The overall plan was renamed Braunschweig while Blau II and III became Clausewitz and Dampfhammer respectively. The name for Blau I remained unaltered as this phase was largely completed by the time the name changes were instigated on 30 June.

4) Much has been made of the inherent weakness in the proposal to capture the oil fields as they could so easily be sabotaged by the retreating Red Army. However, the Germans had made plans to capture the facilities at Maykop by stealth and had trained specialist repair and maintenance units at the Romanian oil fields at Ploesti in the expectation that the Russians would cause as much damage as possible. That these schemes were ultimately unsuccessful does not necessarily discredit the entire project. The shortcomings of many operations are apparent in hindsight.

5) Bock was considered to be in involuntary retirement although still a serving officer. He was killed on 4 May 1945 while attempting to reach Hamburg with his wife and step-daughter by an RAF fighter which strafed the car he was travelling in. He was the only field marshal of the Third Reich period to die as a result of enemy action.

6) A much fuller explanation of the German military's system of Kriegsständenachweisung - usually abbreviated to KStN - is given on page 7 and in STUG, Assault Guns in the East, Volume 2, the seventh title in this series.

7) Throughout this book the titles of Waffen-SS formations are given as they were at the time the action described took place. Thus, prior to July 1942 SS-Division (mot) Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler is referred to as Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler (mot). Similarly SS-Division (mot) Reich was renamed SS-Division (mot) Das Reich in May 1942 while SS-Division (mot) Wiking retained the title it had received in January 1941 until November when all three were renamed as Panzergrenadier divisions.

8) In German accounts Amvrosiivka is referred to as Amwrosiewka while Vasylivka is given as Wassiljewka. Wherever possible we have used the modern versions of place names to assist those readers who wish to conduct their own research.

9) At this time Mühlenkamp's battalion was able to field six Pzkw II, thirty-four Pzkw III and four Pzkw IV tanks. The Panzerjäger company, which was by now attached to the tank battalion as an unofficial 4.Kompanie, reported that only six Marder II vehicles were available for this operation although a full complement of twelve were on hand in September and there is no record of any replacements being received.

10) Klapdor refers to these aircraft by the German word Zerstörer and states they were under the command of a Major Döring. We have however been unable to identify the unit or the officer.

11) This was the Pzkw III commanded by Max Kolodziej depicted on page 15 of the illustration section.

12) Since the war the towns of Sagopshi and Malgobek have grown to the point where they are now basically a single entity but in 1942 there was a great deal of empty space between the two where the Nizhniye Achaluki road ran. Similarly Keskem has been absorbed by Inarki.

13) For the final attack Sturmbannführer Mühlenkamp's battalion would field four Pzkw II, five Pzkw IV, of which just one of the ausf F models remained and twenty-five Pzkw III - fifteen armed with the longer L/60 gun. In addition six of Oeck's self-propelled guns were combat ready.

14) Point 107, which was merely a convenient name for an artillery map reference, is incorrectly referred to as Hill 107 in many accounts.

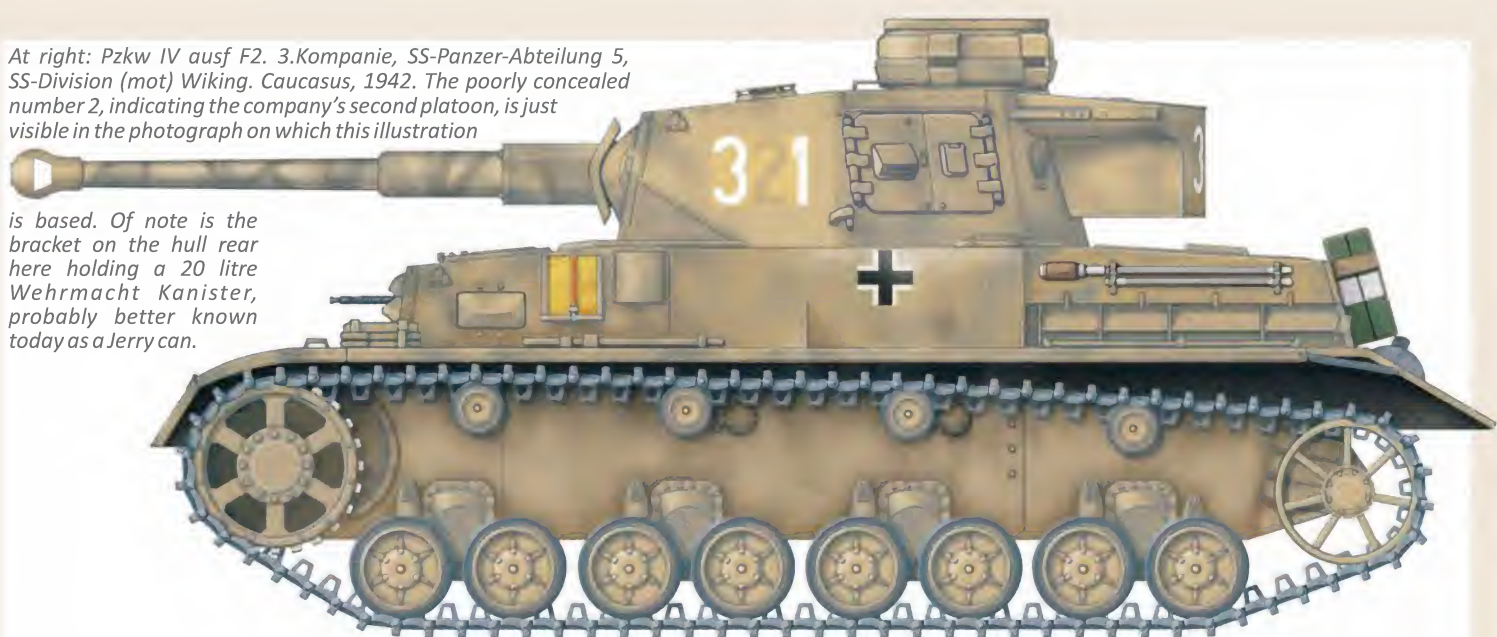
SS-Panzerschütze, SS-Panzer-Abteilung 5, SS Division (mot) Wiking. Summer 1942.

The SS black, woollen Panzer uniform worn by tank crews very quickly proved impractical in the blazing heat of a Russian summer and from a camouflage point of view the colour black was far from ideal. On 1 September 1941, the issue of a new uniform began which went some way towards addressing these problems. Originally designed for armoured reconnaissance personnel, its use was extended to tank crews in 1942. The new uniform consisted of a jacket and trousers cut to the same design as the black Panzer uniform made from a hardwearing, lightweight cotton in a colour referred to as reed-green which provided improved field camouflage. As a loose fitting garment it could also be worn over the black Panzer uniform to preserve it. However in the summer of 1942 photographic evidence shows this uniform was in short supply and many SS tank crews were forced to acquire other types of lightweight clothing including the SS camouflage smock often worn in combination with the SS brown shirt and lightweight, reed-green trousers. As a last resort shirt sleeve order was implemented with lightweight drill trousers. In our illustration the SS-Panzerschütze has been issued the complete two-piece reed-green Panzer uniform. On his jacket he has added the SS Panzer shoulder straps and pinned to his chest is the Panzerkampfabzeichen, or tank assault badge. Underneath the reed green jacket he wears the SS brown tricot, collared shirt with the first pattern field cap for tank crews of the Waffen-SS. This cap was in fact the M35 SS black uniform field cap, recycled for use by SS Panzer crews with the addition of a rose pink Waffenfarbe soutache around the Totenkopf button insignia. His footwear is a pair of M37 ankle boots. Armoured troops wore the minimum of equipment and our illustration reflects this - the Waffen-SS enlisted mans belt with a P38 pistol in its hardshell holster and a pair of general-purpose goggles. Below: Although photographed sometime after the 1942 battles, the lightweight jacket worn here is essentially the same as that shown in our illustration. The SS Hoheitszeichen is the earliest pattern and was worn on the side of the field cap.



At right: Pzkw IV ausf F2. 3.Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Abteilung 5, SS-Division (mot) Wiking. Caucasus, 1942. The poorly concealed number 2, indicating the company's second platoon, is just visible in the photograph on which this illustration

is based. Of note is the bracket on the hull rear here holding a 20 litre Wehrmacht Kanister, probably better known today as a Jerry can.



Above: A Marder II 76.2cm Pak 36(r) self-propelled anti-tank gun of SS-Panzerjäger-Abteilung 5. The battalion was issued with twelve of these vehicles in July 1942 and all were allocated to 3.Kompanie.



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